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Feminist Companion

to

Wisdom Literature

edited by Athalya Brenner

The Feminist Companion to the Bible

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Editor
Athalya Brenner

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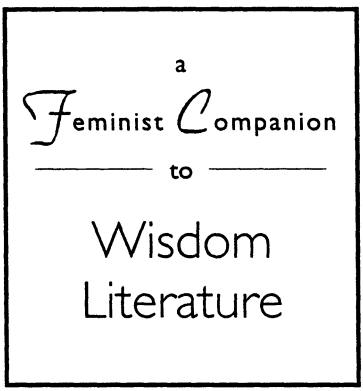

edited by Athalya Brenner

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	D.N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BDB	F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
Bib	*Biblica*
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BLit	*Bibel und Liturgie*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A.E. Cowley
HALAT	W. Baumgartner *et al.*, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
Int	*Interpretation*
ITQ	*Irish Theological Quarterly*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JFSR	*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KBo	Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazkoï
KUB	Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazkoï
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament

NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	*Oudtestamentische Studiën*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
RB	*Revue biblique*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
TDOT	G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*
THAT	Theologisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
ThWAT	G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*
TT	*Teologisk Tidsskrift*
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
VF	*Verkündigung und Forschung*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum*, Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

INTRODUCTION

Athalya Brenner

In Bible scholarship, 'wisdom literature' until recent decades has functioned as a convenient collective designation for Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth and some psalms. The term, it would seem, covers quite a range: rather than typifying a literary genre, it encompasses a variety of genres. From the perspective of form, the term refers to short proverbial sayings, prose, poetry, lists, lengthy philosophical dialogues, and more. The designation is thus not morphological. It designates the hypothetical purpose of such passages, namely to teach and instruct in matters of life, ideologies, socialization and even practical theology. The didactic thrust of 'wisdom' in the Bible, as in cognate ancient East Mediterranean societies, is the unifying element. It is therefore hardly surprising that, in more recent times, traces of wisdom traditions have ben discovered in narratives and poems other than those listed above. Famously, von Rad contributed towards changing the then current scholarly views.[1] For instance, he pointed out that the figuration of the Hebrew/Jewish courtier who, through his personal talent, rhetorical prowess and piety, manages to succeed against the odds in a foreign court (Joseph in Egypt, Gen. 39–50; Mordecai in the book of Esther; Daniel, especially chs. 2 and 5), properly belongs to such 'wisdom' traditions.[2] Such stories offer a blueprint for success in life, a model for young men to emulate; this has been perceived as the purpose of the instruction. This extension or expansion of the designation, I think, is one of the factors to

1. G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (trans. J.D. Martin; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972).

2. G. von Rad, 'Epilogue to the Joseph Story', in *Genesis: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1974), pp. 433-39.

facilitate—in due course—the inclusion of women's stories outside Proverbs–Job–Qoheleth, such as the stories about the 'wise women' of Tekoa and Abel (2 Sam. 14 and 20), within its scope.

Until recent years, scholars tended to describe the so-called 'wisdom literature' of the Hebrew Bible as the domain of the hypothetical 'wise': males, urban, elders in role if not in age. The speaker-in-the-text was conceived of as a male 'teacher', perhaps within a formal framework. Such a framework entails a certain amount of literacy, at the very least, and an urban, relatively affluent setting. The addressee was described as a (young) male in need of education in the ways of life and *savoir-faire*. The relationship between the two, following many such discourses in Proverbs, was understood as typically that of *metaphorical* 'father' and 'son': the addressed 'son' was taken to be not a kin term, but a derived term. It was deduced that a speaker/'father', that is a 'teacher', was the necessary complement—although that is only stated in a few instances (Prov. 1.8a, 4.1-7, 6.20a). A certain confusion between author, narrator and textual speaker obtained: all three positions were described in most scholarly treatments of 'wisdom' as almost synonymous—and gendered as male and older, superior to the assumed repicient of instruction (again, in keeping with similar formulas in cognate East Mediterranean literatures).

Numerous considerations may be adduced against this admittedly tidy characterization of the setting and background of biblical 'wisdom' texts. Take the case of Proverbs. Female figurations—of wisdom conceptualized as a woman of many parts (daughter, lover, wife, mother), the זרה[1] woman and folly conceptualized as a woman, all three central to Proverbs 1–9; of the אשת חיל[2] (31.10-21); of a teaching mother figure (1.8b, 6.20b, 31.1-9; possibly also ch. 7)[3]—envelop the book at both its ends.

1. The Hebrew זרה may be translated as 'strange', 'foreign', 'other'. None of those translations sums up successfully the connotations of the phrase אשה זרה. See below in the Introduction; and articles by Heijerman, Yee, Camp and Washington in this volume.

2. Which may be approximately translated as 'woman of valour' or 'woman of worth'.

3. Cf. F. van Dijk Hemmes, 'Wisdom and Warning Discourse', and

Female discourse, be it viewed as embedded within male discourse[1] or as embedding it,[2] is clearly essential. This state of affairs can be seen facilely as anchored in male fascination with femaleness and femininity; it can also be interpreted differently: as suppressed, submerged or silenced traces of women's traditions. The enlargement of the scope of 'wisdom', together with the questioning of its traditionally-defined character as male, opens up new possibilities for reading such instructive and/or philosophical[3] texts; and for including other texts in the discussion.

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, an extraordinary woman called Christine de Pizan wrote a book she called *The Book of the City of Ladies*.[4] Christine, a prolific author born in the fourteenth century, creates an allegorical picture in which three virtues—Reason, Justice and Rectitude—are conceptualized as women and the intellectual and moral (albeit not social) capacities of women are defended as equal to males'. Christine was obviously literate; she must have been learned as well as courtly. The examples she gives are adduced from European cultural texts of diverse origins. Some of her examples of worthy, wise or brave women are drawn from the Hebrew Bible[5] or related literature.[6] Her concern is twofold: women's natural wisdom and moral qualities should be recognized; and they should be given the education which can make such virtues

A. Brenner, 'Proverbs 1–9: An F Voice?', in A. Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), pp. 48-62 and 113-30 respectively.

1. C.A. Newsom, 'Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9', in P.L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 142-60.

2. C.V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), pp. 182-208.

3. I use 'philosophical' here as a blanket term for 'epistemological', 'ontological', 'existential' and 'ethical'.

4. C. de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (trans. from the French by E.J. Richards; London: Pan Books, 1983).

5. Esther, pp. 145-47; Sarah, Rebekah and Ruth, pp. 155-58; women prophets, pp. 104-106; אשה חיל, 'woman of worth', pp. 89-90. All references are to the English edition of de Pizan's *City of Ladies*.

6. De Pizan, *City of Ladies*: Judith, pp. 143-45; Susanna, pp. 155-56.

flourish into knowledge and participation, in order to ameliorate women's social lot. This amounts to the wish to reclaim or create a space for women in history and culture. Hundreds of years after Christine de Pizan, the question of women and their wisdom is far from resolved. Hence, her project does not seem much different to the project underlying the present volume.

Part I contains three survey articles on the configuration of woman in wisdom literature, each from a different perspective: social (with ancient Near Eastern illuminations), literary/intertextual (in the narrower sense of inner-biblical intertextuality), and theological (with reference to postbiblical Jewish and Christian texts). And yet all three share similar premises and parallel notions. The fourth article in this section constitutes a look at the *ēšet ḥayil* poem (Prov. 31.10-31) which, according to rabbinic Jewish tradition, presents a figuration of an ideal wife and mother. Part II contains essays on the figure of the זרה woman. Part III contains essays on the book of Job. It would therefore appear that this volume adheres to the traditional view of Proverbs, Qoheleth and Job as biblical wisdom literature. Nevertheless, a closer look at the essays themselves will clarify that, proceeding from the traditional definition, they go beyond it.

Part 1: Women and Wisdom: Social Roles and Literary Figurations

Carole Fontaine explores traces of women's life and experience in ancient Israel in her article 'The Social Roles of Women in the World of Wisdom'. After preliminary considerations, she surveys figurations of sage women in the private domain (mother or wife, with special reference to Prov. 31.10-31[1]) and in the public domain (as authors, sages, counsellors, healers and mourners). Fontaine concludes that women contributed to ancient biblical wisdom on both these social levels. She sees the figurations of Woman Wisdom and Woman Stranger[2] as literary expressions of women's involvement in the world of wisdom. At the end of the essay, two figures depict women's social roles, positive and

1. See also Valler's article, 'Who is *ēšet ḥayil* in Rabbinic Literature?'.
2. Fontaine's translation of the Heb. אשה זרה.

negative, in the wisdom world of the Bible and the ancient Near East.

My article, 'Some Observations on the Figurations of Woman in Wisdom Literature' is also a survey. Whereas Fontaine focuses on the social roles of women in wisdom, I focus on the literary strategies deployed in depicting types of woman. In Proverbs, I look at Woman Wisdom, Woman Folly, the זרה woman; in Job, at the figures of Job's wife and daughters; in Qoheleth, at the androcentric worldview advanced; at the female figures in the Joseph narrative, Esther and Daniel 1–6. My particular perspective is: how is the female discourse embedded within the presumably male 'wisdom' discourse read in order to gender the texts, and in what ways do these 'female' voices represent gendered interests?

In 'Wise and Counselling Women in Ancient Israel: Literary and Historical Ideals of the Personified *ḥokmâ*, Silvia Schroer reviews the relevant material from the perspective of theology. Her question is, 'Is there an authentic Jewish-Christian spirituality which is compatible with women's experiences and the epistemology of feminist theology?' Schroer surveys the figure of personified Wisdom as a counselling woman in Proverbs and the Wisdom of Solomon with reference to narratives about wise counselling women in the Hebrew Bible outside wisdom books, and attempts to anchor the literary portraits in historical realities. Next she turns to exploring the socio-religious background of Wisdom as an image of God. Finally, Schroer considers the implications of the biblical *ḥokmâ* texts for contemporary feminist theology, be it Jewish or Christian. Can the Hebrew Bible's Sophia be embraced today by women—and men?

Fontaine quotes the *ēšet ḥayil* poem (Prov. 31.10-31) as an example of how female wisdom is equated with motherly and wifely 'wisdom'. In 'Who is *ēšet ḥayil* in Rabbinic Literature?', Shulamit Valler examines the decidedly male interpretation of this poem by the rabbis. As Fontaine observes, this female paragon of virtue operates within the domestic private domain. The praise is there, but the model confining and restrictive. Although the same model, or mould, operates in rabbinic references to this passage, Valler looks for departures which may hint at other—albeit not predominant—rabbinic models of

women and feminine wisdom. Discussions of Sarah and Abraham on the one hand and Deborah and Barak on the other hand, within the midrashic explication of the poem, point to Sarah's wifely equality with her husband's spirituality. Miriam's spirituality is likewise extolled in the midrash on Proverbs. Serah daughter of Asher is identified as a 'wise' women involved in political activity. Hence, Valler concludes, in addition to the traditional domestic model two more models of wise womanhood can be gleaned from rabbinic literature: that of a female spiritual leader, and that of a political leader. Both models, although representing minority views, obtain within discussions of the Proverbs passage; both afford expanded role models for contemporary women. Here, I think, Valler and Schroer's conclusions overlap—although each author reaches hers by a totally different route.

Part II: Wisdom and Otherness: The Case of the iššâ zārâ

The difficulty of translating the Hebrew modifer זרה in the epithet אשה זרה points to the many enigmas posed by that figure of a woman. Is she 'strange', a 'stranger', 'foreign', 'other', 'liminal'? What does this female image signify—psychologically, socially, historically, religiously, culturally, symbolically, in terms of gender? The next five articles explore these and related questions in reference to this female figuration, as she appears in a few passages in Proverbs 1–9 and, especially, Proverbs 7.

In 'Who Would Blame Her? The "Strange" Woman of Proverbs 7', Mieke Heijerman asks two basic questions: who is this 'woman' and whence the power to kill imputed to her; and, how can womanly readers cope with such a text which, at least on its surface, contains traces of misogyny? After reviewing the socio-cultural contexts, performing a close reading of the relevant passage and a perusal of scholarly interpretations, Heijerman obtains not one but *three* possible portraits of this woman figuration: a mother's rival, a men's scapegoat and a needy woman. She then offers strategies for coping with each of the suggested readings. The essay is concluded on a personal note.

In '"I Have Perfumed My Bed with Myrrh": The Foreign

Woman (*iššâ zārâ*) in Proverbs 1–9', Gale Yee explores how the seductive words attributed to the woman function in the texts so that 'her' discourse can symbolize the antithesis of Wisdom's discourse. Yee defines the discourse of Proverbs 1–9 as a father's instruction to a son. The speech (rhetorical) structure of the discourse is identified, then each section of the chiastic (according to Yee) construction is discussed in greater detail. It transpires that the *iššâ zārâ* is presented as a symbolic personification of all evil. Such a portrait is disturbing, but also signifies the weakness of the patriarchal framework that produces it. Disturbing too is the presentation of both woman Wisdom and the *zārâ* woman as an erotic lover, be she assessed as positive or negative. Like Heijerman, Yee feels that the imagery and referential meaning are difficult for woman readers. The ultimate question is: can a woman seek wisdom or is she—the female reader—condemned to remain an *iššâ zārâ*?

Yee's article was first published in 1989. Her piece 'The Socio-Literary Production of the "Foreign Woman" in Proverbs' is a response, written in 1994, to her previous article. Yee defines her previous analysis as literary-critical, whereas since writing it she has become interested also in sociological approaches to ancient women and the society in which they lived (and which produced the Proverbs collection). The ideological production of the *iššâ zārâ* will be investigated in a new book Yee is writing on this subject. Here she delineates some issues that, in her view, require further study: for instance, women's access to means and modes of economic production; gender construction in that society; ideologies; women's perspectives within the text; and a closer look at the rhetoric of the *iššâ zārâ* passages. Finally, Yee would like to mediate between the two viewpoints published subsequently: Newsom's, in which the relevant passages are read as a father's rhetorics; and mine, which constitutes an attempt at recovering a female voice behind some of them. It seems to me that, in this short response to herself, Yee outlines what needs to be done further concerning research on Proverbs 1–9 in general, not only for her own forthcoming project.

Claudia Camp's immense contributions to Proverbs study are well known. Here her work is represented by 'Wise and Strange: An Interpretation of the Female Imagery in Proverbs in Light of

Trickster Mythology', originally published in *Semeia*. The personifications of Wisdom and the Strange Woman, and their interrelatedness, are read from the perspectives of comparative myth and folklore. Five trickster characteristics provide categories for analysing the two female figurations: basic duality; adoption of order and disorder; use of language, both wise and deceitful; references to theodicy and human evil; and liminal status. Because trickster imagery is applicable to the *two* personifications of woman, it undermines the message of absolute opposition between them while emphasizing their paradoxical unity. Finally, some reflections are offered about the value of the 'woman as trickster' image in feminist thought.

In 'The Strange Woman (אשה זרה/נכריה) of Proverbs 1–9 and Post-Exilic Judaean Society', Harold Washington focuses on the economic issues manifest in the text, namely the economic interests which underlie the polemic against this figuration of woman. His contention is that during the early post-exilic (Persian) period, when (in his view) Proverbs 1–9 was redacted as an introduction to the book, this figuration represented women who did not belong to the community. Exogamous marriages compromised interrelated issues such as genealogical lineage, land tenure and cultic membership. Thus, the 'strange' woman posed a threat to the social and economic integrity of the true (male) community. This socio-economic anxiety is an important factor in the conglomeration of motives—religious, moral and sexual among them—that inform the sharp warnings against such female 'types'. Washington considers the Strange Woman motif in other ancient Near Eastern literatures, 'her' identity in Proverbs, and the socio-historical contexts he suggests for the text's production in order to locate the *iššâ zārâ* negative imagery within a specific socio-historical context. He readily admits, though, that the negative image persisted into postbiblical literature long after it had outlived its historical relevance.

The articles included here provide varied lenses through which to read texts about the antithetical pair of female figurations that is central to Proverbs 1–9: literary, rhetorical, socio-ideological, socio-historical, comparative mythological-ethnopoetical. More perspectives can undoubtedly be utilized

for reading the same cluster of images and metaphors of woman, and others in Proverbs. It is hoped that the richness of methodologies and materials employed will serve as a reminder of the breadth of current feminist scholarship.

Part III: On the Book of Job

Feminism is a worldview, a political statement. Confining it, in Bible studies, only to repeated readings of women's stories is a misconception. The 'woman question', so-called, may and indeed often does function as a centre for feminist inquiry. It may also serve as a stepping stone for the analysis of other, non-gendered issues. The authors of the essays on Job demonstrate that a feminist approach is also applicable, with interesting results, to texts that hardly refer to women figures.

In the book of Job, women are decidedly peripheral. Job's textual daughters (chs. 1 and 42) and wife (chs. 2 and 31) seem to be incidental to both plot and ideo-religious discourse. But does this surface situation reflect a lack of female or feminine principles in the work? Each of the essays provides a nuanced 'No, this is not so' answer to that question.

Is Job righteous? Lillian Klein asks, in 'Job and the Womb: Text about Men; Subtext about Women', by whose standards Job is or is not so—by divine, or non-gendered human, or male-only standards. Klein's parameters are rhetorical: the book is a debate; the forms and uses of language are crucial to any debate. The analysis of form and language reveals that Job's claim of righteousness is a patriarchal, male claim which is made at the expense of woman. A paradox is produced in/by the text: Job is righteous by divine standards although he does not show the consideration to women a man with integrity must. Nevertheless, the manifestly male text of the book has a subtext of 'preoccupation with females, especially female reproductive powers. This coupled rejection of woman and suppressed interest in woman's sexual functions discloses a significant fissure in the overt male concerns about righteousness depicted in Job'.

In 'The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst', Ellen van Wolde argues that the textual Job undergoes a development. A

comparison of the end of the book to its beginning is of special value for illustrating that, finally, the character Job is not the person he formerly was. Job travels an internal route, of which he is the focus. Van Wolde attempts to chart this intensely personal development. In spite of the presentation of this development as such, Job's wife emerges as a dispatcher figure although, formally and narrationally, she is peripheral to the story and the debate. The nameless wife has hardly any part in the process of transformation Job undergoes. Nevertheless, she is the one to start his spiritual journey by pressing Job to speak up and confront God (2.9). At the time, Job refuses (2.10). Later on this is precisely what he does, at great length and articulation. The dialogues he embarks on ultimately bring about the change and then reversal. Job finally prospers, whereas the wife disappears from view after her initial appearance—although, through the gap in ch. 42, one may insist on seeing her as the mother of Job's second-round children.

In 'A Feminist Approach to the Book of Job', Lyn Bechtel proposes a paradigm for understanding Job. Her paradigm, as she writes, 'is an expansion and synthesis of the fundamental insights that lie behind the ancient "myth of the goddess" in the ancient Near East, in which the basic principles of creation and nature are expressed through the various symbolic images of goddesses and gods'. In those myths, as in modern theories of complexity and chaos, life is an interfacing of oppositional forces, a differentiated unity. Denial of this unity and the human introduction of dual order into the arbitrariness of creation, together with the human tendency to over-achieve and over-accumulate wealth, is the starting point of the book. Job is a wealthy upper-crust patriarch who leads an ordered, rationalized life. As the story and debate unfold, Job learns that arbitrariness and chaos, the divine creation, cannot be reduced to ordered, rational concepts. Thus, according to Bechtel, the book is a return to goddess theology—within a monotheistic framework.

As in other volumes of the Feminist Companion series, no claim is made in this collection for either a comprehensive or representative choice of essays. The essays offered are but a few specimens of some recent paths feminist scholarship on wisdom

literature has taken. No title for exclusivity is made. Questions of women's epistemology are far from clarified in today's world. Once more, what constitutes womanly knowledge?

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Part I
WOMEN AND WISDOM: SOCIAL ROLES AND LITERARY FIGURATIONS

THE SOCIAL ROLES OF WOMEN IN THE WORLD OF WISDOM

Carole R. Fontaine

The purpose of this essay is to explore some of the ways in which the lived experience of women of the past found its way into the wisdom tradition—the literary forms, pragmatic content and theological speculations—of ancient Israel. To this end, I will consider here the social roles played by women in the wisdom movement, the attitude concerning women which they represent in the canonical wisdom books of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, and their reflection in the literary personification of Wisdom as a woman (Woman Wisdom).

It might be useful to pause here to give a definition of 'sage', the general term which describes the social role of one in the wisdom tradition. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue consider the definition of 'sage' to be 'one who has composed a book or piece belonging to the wisdom literature of the ancient Near East'.[1] Other scholars, like R. Harris, working out of cuneiform and hieroglyphic sources, consider 'sage' under the rubrics proposed by A. Leo Oppenheim, that is, 'scribe as bureaucrat, poet and scholar', and then try to adduce evidence of Mesopotamian women who might have fit into such roles.[2] I will adopt a fuller definition here, reckoning as 'sages' any practitioners or tradents of the wisdom tradition, in addition to those who composed or copied wisdom books. Sages then are any persons who routinely perform one or more of the following tasks associated with the wisdom tradition: authorship, scribal duties (copying, collecting, editing), counselling, management of economic resources,

1. J.G. Gammie and L.G. Perdue (eds.), *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lane, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. x.

2. R. Harris, 'The Female "Sage" in Mesopotamian Literature (With an Appendix on Egypt)', in Gammie and Perdue (eds.), *The Sage*, pp. 5-6.

conflict resolution, teaching and healing. By using this broader definition, we are able to number women among the sages because of their practice, even where we cannot attribute specific texts to them.

In general, the wisdom tradition presents us with a paradigmatic illustration of the great paradox observed elsewhere in patriarchal literature with respect to women: that the elevated female figures such as Woman Wisdom (Prov. 1–9) or the Woman of Worth (Prov. 31.10-31) may be inversely proportional to the truth of real women's lives. That is, such fine figures may just as easily be an index of women's lack of power and status as a reflection of a gentler, kinder social reality for women: they must always be examined on a case-by-case basis in conjunction with whatever ethnographic and economic data that can be adduced.[1]

It is possible to explain the presence of characters like Woman Wisdom in such androcentric contexts as an example of male 'bad conscience': 'Wisdom: can't live with Her, can't live without Her'. As we shall see below, these exalted representations serve to bind up a variety of ideas about women and goddesses and give expression to their role in the great scheme of things.[2] One of the most remarkable things about such figures in Israel's traditions is their mobility and strength of presence. They move easily between the public domain of the gates, walls and marketplaces and the private domain of women's worlds, and they do so, for the most part, without the typical female humility formulae. Woman Wisdom stretches out her hand without asking permission to do so. While that may not have been reflective of her ancient sisters' condition, it is a goal toward

1. For example, veneration of the Virgin Mary in historical Catholicism does not correlate positively with a high value placed on women or their freedom to fill a variety of high-status roles. Likewise, the 'Cult of True Womanhood' in Victorian England coincided with attempts to restrict the social roles of women to the private domain of the household.

2. C. Camp, 'Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor: A Theological Consideration', in K.G. Hoglund, E.F. Huwiler, J.T. Glass and R.W. Lee (eds.), *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm.* (JSOTSup, 58; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), pp. 45-76.

which her modern daughters may press.[1]

It should be remembered, however, that these literary figures, as well as the social roles of women which influenced them, are all seen from the male sages' perspective; the 'facts' about women's lives recorded here may express only a partial truth, or at least the only parts the sages felt to be worthy of comment. In general, however, wisdom literature is considered to be more closely related to social reality because of its pragmatic concerns.[2]

1. *Preliminary Considerations*

One of the peculiarities of dealing with Israel's wisdom tradition is the special need to consider the effects of 'foreign influence' on these texts and their worldview because the subject materials so patently demand this methodological awareness. One cannot speak of wisdom without speaking of Egypt or Mesopotamia, though speaking of wisdom in those 'primary'[3] societies is a rather different enterprise, requiring differing areas of expertise of their interpreters. The sages were comparative thinkers: because of their association 'vertically' through time with 'tradition' and 'horizontally' (across cultures during

1. There is a modern 'proverb' to be sought here: if Wisdom's waiting hand is ignored, should human women be surprised when their testimony goes unheard? Is the daughter greater than the mother? Like mother, like daughter... our mother was a Hittite...

2. C.R. Fontaine, '"A Heifer from Thy Stable": On Goddesses and the Status of Women in the Ancient Near East', in A. Bach (ed.), *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), p. 72.

3. 'Primary' societies are those which influence the civilizations around them, for whatever reason. In the ancient Near East, Egypt and Mesopotamia represent the primary societies, based on the economic and cultural advantages brought by settling next to major rivers, the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris. Israel and those other cultures occupying the 'land-bridge' between the two great river-valley civilizations are 'secondary': their cultures were first incubated in the primary areas, and then transmitted by trade, emigration and war. Naturally, 'secondary' cultures routinely modify the received traditions of their more fortunate neighbors, introducing changes which better harmonize with their unique experience.

the same time period) with wisdom contacts in other cultures, they did not perform their intellectual activities in a theological, ethical, literary or practical vacuum. In the midst of Israel's culture which emphasized its theological 'uniqueness', the sages worked with the connections and similarities of their teachings to those of their neighbors, creating a kind of intellectual ecumenism, as it were. They were 'wise' precisely because they honed their thought on the wisdom of the ages and the experience of the cultures that preceded and surrounded them.

Similarly, our 'ancient ecumenicists' in Israel demand of interpreters a sensitivity to literary issues since we are so clearly dealing with artistic products of verbal artisans, and not merely with a tradition of scribal copies. Literary artistry was a matter of great concern to our authors, and so a literary method is in order to study the language acts which they produced.

One more introductory note is necessary when we think of the social locations and social roles of women sages in Israel. The origin of the wisdom traditions in the scribal bureaucracy and schools of the surrounding primary river valley cultures are well documented, but the situation is not nearly so clear in Israel. The diversity of the origins of Israel's wisdom traditions may be blurred if we make normative the experience of Mesopotamia and Egypt where sages were elite servants of the royal bureaucracy. It is easy to 'underobserve' the role of the 'folk'—certainly the group among whom most of our women sages must be sought—in the origins of Israel's wisdom, elusive creatures that they are. In this respect, questing after the 'folk sage' is a task beset by the same methodological problems as the task of searching out the 'female sage'. While it is true that we may certainly associate the formation of some of our texts with the needs of the royal establishment, the vigorous stream of folk wisdom that fed into the great river of Israel's wisdom often receives less attention than it ought, thus concealing the importance of Israel's tribal heritage in shaping the later monarchic experiment. With respect to the educational enterprise of training sages to carry on the wisdom tradition, many scholars have underestimated what must have been the amazing impact of the movement from cuneiform or hieroglyphic syllabaries to the more or less straightforward phonetic alphabet of Hebrew

used by our Israelite tradents of later times. The scribal education demanded for the mastery of hieroglyphics in Egypt and the diplomatic languages of Mesopotamia was still necessary in Israel to some extent for the purposes of diplomacy. However, this need not have rendered the rest of the non-elite and undereducated population functionally illiterate with respect to their own language. There is no reason to assume that the folk—women included—were without insights into human experience or lacked the linguistic capacities to give verbal expression to such gleanings in the form of traditional sayings, parables, riddles, and so on. Nor were the folk—women included—without the daily conflicts that make proverbial forms so useful for settling disputes in traditional societies; a survey of proverb use among the various peoples of Africa indicates how vital such a folk tradition can be—even in the absence of scribes![1] Indeed, the Hebrew Bible's indecision on the subject of the monarchy and its interpretation in later tradition may be a survival of the sentiments of the non-elite when considering a form of governance which not only struck at the heart of some of the basic formulations of Yahwism, but ultimately failed to protect its people from surrounding cultural predators. Such ambivalence on the part of the average person in the gate suggests that folk wisdom may not have died a quiet death just because the fancy scribes in Jerusalem had appropriated a few good Egyptian instructions and were now in business for the king.

2. *Sage Women in the Private Domain*

Wife and Mother as Sage

If women were not normally included among those who might receive a scribal education and the training needed to become an official court scribe, author or counsellor, then where should the

1. See C.R. Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament: A Contextual Study* (Bible and Literature, 5: Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982) for further discussion, as well as Claus Westermann's *Wurzeln der Weisheit: Die ältesten Sprüche Israels und anderer Völker* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

search for their connections to the wisdom movement begin? As is often the case in the study of women's lives in the past, we look for women's participation first in the arena to which patriarchal culture routinely assigns them, the 'private domain' of the home.

Initially, we may seek the association of women with 'wisdom' by surveying the traditional roles of wife and mother.[1] The poem in praise of the 'Woman of Worth' (a more literal translation than 'virtuous wife') in Prov. 31.10-31 summarizes well:

> A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.
> The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.
> She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.
> She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.
> She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from far away.
> She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and tasks for her servant-girls.
> She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
> She girds herself with strength, and makes her arms strong.
> She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.
> She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.
> She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.
> She is not afraid for her household when it snows, for all her household are clothed in crimson.
> She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple.
> Her husband is known in the city gates, taking his seat among the elders of the land.
> She makes linen garments and sells them, she supplies the merchant with sashes.

1. C.R. Fontaine, 'The Sage in Family and Tribe', in Gammie and Perdue (eds.), *The Sage*, pp. 155-64; and C. Camp, 'The Female Sage in Ancient Israel and in the Biblical Wisdom Literature', in Gammie and Perdue (eds.), *The Sage*, pp. 185-204.

> Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.
> She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
> She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.
> Her children rise up and call her happy; her husband too, and he praises her:
> 'Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all'.
> Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
> Give her a share in the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the city gates (NRSV).

As we often see reported in the biblical literature, women were the managers of the private world of the home. Obviously, women's sexual services were important to the men of patriarchal societies for providing legitimate male heirs to inherit the father's name and estate. Even beyond that, however, women were critical to the successful functioning of any extended family. Proverbs 31 shows very well the manifold tasks that fell to the good wife or 'Woman of Worth'.[1] Not only did this worthy woman work herself at the day-to-day tasks of 'women's work' such as spinning, weaving and sewing, she is also shown managing her household so well that none of her servants are idle and no one fears 'shortfalls' as fruitful seasons draw to a close. Along with these managerial tasks of economic allocation, she also serves as teacher and even finds time to do good works for the poor. Most interestingly, in her role of wife she goes beyond the boundaries of her own front door: she sells goods she has produced, makes important purchases of real estate, and puts in crops according to her plans (vv. 16, 24).

Although not specifically mentioned in this passage, the mother's roles in teaching, counselling and conflict resolution within the home are also tasks which qualify her as a practitioner of wisdom. The 'mother's teaching' is mentioned in Prov. 1.8 and 6.20, references which are followed up by acknowledging a mother's sorrow when her child does not heed her

1. See C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Bible and Literature, 11; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), pp. 79-96.

instruction (10.1 and, by implication, 15.20). While no examples of the mother's 'Torah' survive with the exception of the passage by the queen mother cited below, the fact that this pedagogy is always mentioned as parallel to the 'father's instruction/commandment' (1.8; 6.20) shows that it was held in high esteem in this traditional society. The mother's role as the instructor of very young children of both sexes, girls of all ages, and the female domestic work force is one of the great sources of her power, making her an 'authority' within the household.

Part of the mother's teaching tasks no doubt found further expression in counselling and conflict resolution, as she modelled effective ways of settling disputes and managing the men of the extended family. While modern persons may look askance at some of the 'crafty' and manipulative behaviour displayed by the wives and mothers portrayed in the biblical tradition, it should be remembered that the use of 'indirect means'—such as gossip, shaming behavior, untruths, promotion of 'harem' rivalries and so on—are typical strategies employed by those who do not have direct access to power.[1] When wives and mothers are not allowed to give peremptory orders, they readily turn to other methods to make their influence felt. In fact, the counsel of women was valued in Israel, if we are to attribute any credence at all to the stories handed down to us. Husbands who do *not* heed the subtle advice of their wives—like Job and Nabal—are doomed to endless repetition of narrative episodes (Job[2]), or disappear from the story altogether (Nabal).

We may also add to the roles performed by wife and mother those of 'healer' and 'mourner', both of which are particularly associated with wisdom (see discussion below, section 3). It is the mother, wife and sister to whom the care of sick family

1. E. Fuchs, 'Who is Hiding the Truth? Deceptive Women and Biblical Androcentrism', in A. Yarbro Collins (ed.), *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 137-44; and '"For I Have the Way of Women": Deception, Gender, and Ideology in Biblical Narrative', *Semeia* 42 (1988), pp. 68-83; see also Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 124-39.

2. C.R. Fontaine, 'Folktale Structure in the Book of Job: A Formalist Reading', in E. Follis (ed.), *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup, 40; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), pp. 215-16.

members is assigned (see the unfortunate case of Tamar in 2 Sam. 13), so that the activity of nursing was probably taught to daughters and female slaves along with other parts of the mother's Torah. Likewise, the women of the household are mourners par excellence: the Wise Woman of 2 Sam. 14.2 pretends to be mourning in order to carry out her plan to prick the conscience of the king; the harlots of 1 Kgs 3.16-28 implicitly bring their cause for mourning over a dead child to the wise king for a settlement. Women's association with illness and grieving is attested in the earliest materials available from the ancient Near East: when Dumuzi, the shepherd fertility god of Sumerian Uruk, goes to the underworld, his wife, the goddess Inanna, 'weeps bitterly for her young husband'; Sirtur, Dumuzi's mother, weeps for him, saying 'My heart plays the reed pipe of mourning', and his sister Geshtinanna wanders the city weeping for her lost brother.[1] Indeed, the grief of Geshtinanna moves Inanna to accept her offer of taking Dumuzi's place in death for half of every year, thus restoring fertility to the land. The mourning of devoted sisters and daughters is attested in Ugaritic epics as well.[2]

The positive roles, mostly drawn from the world of the household, which qualify average women as practitioners of wisdom are also balanced by negative ones in the thinking of the sages. While a good wife (and by implication, mother) might be seen as a gift 'from the Lord' (Prov. 18.22; 19.14), a wife who nags, brings shame, or acts foolishly is just as much of a possibility, and a dreadful one at that (Prov. 11.16, 22; 12.4; 14.1; 19.13; 21.9, 19; 25.24). The good wife and mother whose sexuality, when properly contained—that is, kept under the control of men—brings life, is inverted in the negative character of the 'adultress' or 'loose' or 'foolish woman', who appears as the composite figure of 'Woman Stranger', the evil twin of

1. D. Wolkstein and S.N. Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), pp. 85-89.

2. M. Coogan (ed. and trans.), 'Aqhat', in *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 41; cf. also 'Kirta', p. 69.

Woman Wisdom, in Proverbs 1–9.[1] While women in their proper roles (wife, mother, daughter, sister) within the home might well be viewed as 'flowing water'—almost always a symbol of life in the arid Near East—by the sages (Prov. 5.15-20), their negative counterparts are seen as deadly. Those who follow Woman Stranger's ways 'go down to death' (Prov. 2.18-19; 5.5-6, 22.14), never to be seen again. Like the efficacious wisdom on the tongue of the good woman, crafty language use is a hallmark of this negative incarnation of the wise wife: the words of the adulteress or loose woman are 'smooth', dripping honey (Prov. 5.3; 7.3). For men who believe that 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits' (Prov. 18.21, RSV), woman Stranger's command of language—the power of the tongue—is damning indeed, and a clear indication that she embodies the inversion of true, life-giving wisdom. Consider the male sage's warning against her in Prov. 7.4-27 (NRSV):

> Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,' and call insight your intimate friend,
> that they may keep you from the loose woman, from the adultress with her smooth words.
> For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice,
> and I saw among the simple ones, I observed among the youths, a young man without sense,
> passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house
> in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness.
> Then a woman comes toward him, decked out like a prostitute, wily of heart.
> She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home;
> now in the street, now in the squares, and at every corner she lies in wait.
> She seizes him and kisses him, and with impudent face she says to him:

1. See C. Camp's excellent study of this multivalent symbol, 'What's So Strange about the Strange Woman?', in D. Jobling, P.L. Day and G.T. Sheppard (eds.), *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1991), pp. 17-31.

'I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows;
so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you!
I have decked my couch with coverings, colored spreads of Egyptian linen;
I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.
Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with love.
For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey.
He took a bag of money with him; he will not come home until full moon.'
With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him.
Right away he follows her, and goes like an ox to the slaughter, or bounds like a stag toward the trap
until an arrow pierces its entrails. He is like a bird rushing into a snare, not knowing that it will cost him his life.
And now, my children, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth.
Do not let your hearts turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths,
for many are those she has laid low, and numerous are her victims.
Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.

We can see here that for the sage, this female figure is an embodiment of all the wifely virtues turned upside down. Instead of 'opening her mouth with wisdom' (Prov. 31.26), this woman uses her smooth words to proposition her innocent prey, acting as a sort of tutor in folly. In so far as she uses language so seductively, she is a kind of perverse, if unofficial, 'author'. She understands well the ways of her household, and uses that knowledge to aid her in her wicked pursuits. She understands her religious obligations (7.14), as well as the delights of seduction (vv. 15-16), so that she represents a formidable figure of 'anti-wife', one who brings death and not life to the men she seeks.

Looking at the imagery used by the male sages to describe the figures of wife and mother and loose woman or seductress, we may observe a basic similarity in the sage's depiction of each. The good woman is a 'well', 'cistern', 'flowing water', and a 'fountain' whose love 'intoxicates' her husband (Prov. 5.15-20,

NRSV). Wells and cisterns were dug out through intensive male labor: fountains and springs represent water which comes to surface usefulness without such human interventions, but even there the water must then be channeled or managed by the communities who make use of it. In contrast, the adultress or seductress is consistently associated with Sheol, the marshy pit of the underworld inhabited by the dead. The difference is one of degree for the sages: female reality is associated with murky, underground places of hidden power. Men who dig down only a little bit—as difficult as the digging may be—may find a well that gives flowing water, and hence, life, even though that life comes with the risks associated with loss of control (that is, 'intoxication'). Even such life-giving waters must be rigorously controlled by men. Those unfortunate males who penetrate too deeply into the secret places of female sexuality dig themselves into a cosmic pit from which there is no emergence. In both cases, the images evoke the powerful male fear of being swallowed up and washed away by watery caverns of female potency. Only intensive labor or complete avoidance will serve men when they venture into female domains.

3. *Women Sages in the Public Domain*

Women as Authors and 'Official' Sages

According to cuneiform specialist Rivkah Harris, it is highly unlikely that many Mesopotamian or Egyptian women ever received full scribal educations (or would have wanted to, had it been possible).[1] Since knowledge is power, and training is the key to success, this acted as an effective limit on the roles females could fill in their societies. As always, upper-class and lower-class women might experience more freedom of choice and movement.[2] Women as a group tend to do better in societies

1. Harris, 'Female Sage', pp. 3-10, where she comments that 'female' and 'sage' were contradictions in terms in the ancient Near Eastern world.

2. Upper-class women have more social possibilities open to them because they are related to males of high status who may make exceptions for them, die and leave them in power, or bequeath significant economic resources into their control. Women of low status usually

which are more egalitarian, less ranked and stratified so that distinctions between the public 'assigned' power of men and the private, informal power of women blur. Because of this, ancient Israel with its two 'pioneer' periods of the Settlement and post-exilic times actually offered more scope for women's inclusion in the world of wisdom. That is, we are able to look for women sages in the same kinds of situations, often informal, where one might look for traditional 'folk' sages.

With respect to authorship of wisdom texts, scholars have not yet decided whether dictating one's text rather than writing it down oneself (for which a full-blown scribal education would have been a prerequisite) compromises the quality of the authorship—in our minds, if not in the minds of the ancients. There are a variety of folk genres whose composition is usually by females—lullabies, working songs, love songs, and so on—and so we must be prepared to see some argue for women as authors even where their work may not have survived. As most working on these topics have found, in the absence of data on the invisible members of society—women, children, slaves—we must work by, as Harris puts it, 'controlled inference'.[1] We also must evaluate better the meaning of slavery and low status and how this intersects with our understanding of wisdom tradents whom we implicitly perceive as having high status roles. If women trained as scribes to serve royal princesses or priestesses—at Mari or in the cloisters of Sippar—were slaves, albeit ones of high status, how shall we number them among the wise? Are they only 'semi-sage', because they are slaves, or are they perhaps 'super-sage', because they practice their craft without the full authorizing qualities of entitlement that come when a free man engages in his profession? How does the fact that such women scribes, according to Harris, usually served only other women affect our ascription of status to them?[2]

These questions aside, it is still true that some few women *did* find their way into the scribal elite and may even be reckoned as

have more freedom of movement than middle-class women, precisely because their low status frees them from the social codes governing 'respectability'.

1. Harris, 'Female Sage', p. 3.
2. 'Female Sage', p. 7.

successful practitioners of that high literary art. Enheduanna of Ur, high priestess of the Nanna, the moon god, and devotee of Inanna, goddess of love and war, composed a series of hymns to temples, and a great poem of praise to her goddess.[1] Her work became a definitive part of the scribal corpus and represents the first non-anonymous poetry in historical record. One female scribe of Mesopotamia, Ninshapatada of Old Babylonian Uruk, produced a composition which was so excellent an example of the scribal tradition that her work found its way into the official 'canon' at Larsa and was used to train subsequent scribes in literary technique. In modern times, too, the historical information which she so carefully incorporates into her flattering appeal to King Rim-Sin to spare her conquered city of Durum is considered invaluable for the reconstruction of historical dates and scribal conventions.[2] Her crafty rhetoric, used on behalf of her folk group to achieve the very desirable end of continued existence, shows that she was well educated by scribal school and female experience. Other Mesopotamian women, as well as some Egyptians, may also have composed extant texts and some served as scribes.[3]

Within the Hebrew Bible, we cannot rule out the possibility that women sages may have contributed to the stock of folk proverbs which found their way into the book of Proverbs, nestled among the artistically crafted two-lined proverbs created (most probably) by the court sages. It is not possible at present, however, to point to any one proverb and say with certainty that it was authored by a woman, since the content of a proverb is not an invariable guide to its origin. Proverbs about the family, or herbcraft, for example, need not be composed by women, although they reflect the (supposed) interests of women. Certainly, if women had written many of the proverbs found in

1. Fontaine, 'Heifer', pp. 77-80.

2. Harris, 'Female Sage', p. 8; and W.W. Hallo, 'Sumerian Historiography', in H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (eds.), *History, Historiography, and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), pp. 17-20.

3. Harris, 'Female Sage', pp. 9-10, 14-17; and W.W. Hallo, 'The Women of Sumer', in D. Schmandt-Besserat (ed.), *The Legacy of Sumer* (Bibliotheca Mesopotamica, 4; Malibu, CA: Undena, 1976), pp. 30-33.

that book, we would expect to see far more about drunken, violent husbands, and less emphasis on the 'nagging wife' as the sole scapegoat for domestic discord (cf. Prov. 21.9, 19; 25.24; 27.15).

There is, however, one instance within Israel's wisdom tradition where we might reasonably posit female authorship, or at least composition, if not the actual writing down of the text. This is the rather remarkable example of an 'Instruction' attributed to the queen mother of King Lemuel in Prov. 31.1-9. The instruction form is a unified composition known from Egypt, and it may consist of proverbs, admonitions and prohibitions, as well as pertinent examples. A king or aging bureaucrat undertook to place his life-wisdom into a persuasive literary piece that he then passed on to his successors. That this form found its way to Israel is apparent in the number of fatherly instructions by the sages which add structure to Proverbs 1–9 and Proverbs 22–24 (1.1-19; 2.1-22; 3.1-12, 21-35; 4.1-9, 10-19, 20-27, 5.1-23; 6.20-35; 7.1-27; 22.17–24.22). There, the instructions cited deal primarily with the topics necessary for a young man to make his way in the world of court intrigue and professional circles. Table-manners, 'professionalism', and warnings against the wiles of women are among typical themes found in the form. Let us listen to the words of the royal mother.

> The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him: No, my son! No, son of my womb! No, son of my vows!
> Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings.
> It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink;
> or else they will drink and forget what has been decreed, and will pervert the rights of all the afflicted.
> Give strong drink to one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress;
> let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.
> Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute.
> Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy (NRSV).

The queen mother who speaks in Proverbs 31 gives ample evidence of 'the mother's Torah' ('teaching') spoken of elsewhere in Proverbs (1.8b; 6.20) when she addresses her princely son. Like the male sages, she makes use of direct address using familial terms ('No, my son! No, son of my womb! No, son of my vows!', 31.2) and feels free to make direct admonitions and prohibitions, making vigorous use of imperatives (vv. 3, 6, 8, 9), showing that she has authority to speak and expects her words to be heard and obeyed. Again, like the male authors of instructions, she takes up the usual themes seen in the genre: warnings against drunkenness and women (vv. 3-5), and advice about performing the traditional protective tasks assigned to rulers (vv. 8-9). Her instruction is particularly interesting for its ability to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate contexts for a single act: the powerful ought *not* to drink because it will impair their execution of their duties; the powerless, however, might well profit from a drink in which to drown their woes (vv. 4-7). Prov. 26.4-5 shows a similar attention to the variable nature of experience in its counsel for handling fools, but the queen mother of Proverbs 31 introduces a compassionate and thoughtful note not apparent in the other citation. The queen mother presented here is not the only queen known to us who uses the language of wisdom to achieve her goals: Queen Puduḫepa of the Late Bronze Age Hittite empire (see below) also used proverbs to achieve her goals in dealing with the gods.[1]

The androcentric Hebrew Bible is not always so positively disposed to view the activity of its queens, however, especially when they show themselves crafty enough to manipulate the legal traditions to their own ends. Just as we have the positive queen mother of Proverbs, she is balanced by the negative portrait of another queen mother, Jezebel of Israel (1 Kgs 16.31–20.20; 2 Kgs 9.30-37). Jezebel's pursuit of her own religious 'reforms' is a source of scandal to the writers of Kings, but it is in the episode of Naboth's vineyard that we see the Israelite conservatives' fears of educated foreign women fully realized.

1. C.R. Fontaine, 'Queenly Proverb Performance: The Prayer of Puduḫepa (KUB XXI, 27)', in Hoglund *et al.* (eds.), *The Listening Heart*, pp. 95-126.

In 1 Kgs 21.5-16, we see Jezebel taking matters into her own hands to overturn Israelite customs of land tenure while her husband sulks. She achieves her aims by writing letters in Ahab's name, appropriating his seal to authorize her orders and, furthermore, her entire plot hinges on a sophisticated understanding of community laws and customs which she subtly manipulates for nefarious ends. While commentators dispute whether Jezebel actually conceived of the plan on her own, or wrote the letters herself, it cannot be denied that the authors of this text could fully envision her acting with a kind of perverse wisdom and authority. Jezebel, of course, is only one of the foreign queens who are roundly castigated by the historical writers of the Hebrew Bible for their excessive influence as authoritative counsellors to their innocent husbands (cf. 1 Kgs 11.1-8; 2 Kgs 11).

Wise Women: Counsellors, Healers and Mourners

Many of the roles we have already seen women filling within the relatively private world of the home take them across that threshold and into the 'public domain' of the community at large. Women managing their household's economic stores might venture into buying and selling (Prov. 31.10-31; see discussion above); wives and mothers known for their common-sense teachings and ability to resolve conflicts might be drafted into the service of their neighborhoods, towns or cities. Such women are found in 2 Samuel as 'wise women', and their sisters are well attested in the Indo-European culture of the Hittites, a people who occupied Anatolia from the end of the Middle Bronze Age until the beginning of the Iron Age (see below).

One of the most critical features of Israel's wise women was, once again, their excellent and timely use of language in the resolution of conflicts (2 Sam. 14 and 20).[1] Like any male sage, they take up their public role without hesitation and with an expectation of being heard and valued, although 'mother' imagery is used to 'authorize' their interventions, at least in part. Proverbs and proverbial phrases, the tools of the sage, fall

1. C. Camp, 'The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel', *CBQ* 43 (1981), pp. 14-29; and 'The Female Sage', pp. 187-90.

from their lips as needed and are as efficacious as the counsels of their brothers in the craft (2 Sam. 14.14; 20.18). What began as women's wisdom in the world of the home has clearly gone public, to the good of all.

We must add another category to the list of sage functions that mothers and wise women perform: that of folk healer. Those dealing with the cuneiform traditions call our attention to the application of wisdom terminology to physicians in a number of places.[1] Training for the profession of physician (LU.AZU) doubtless required some sort of scribal education, even if an abbreviated one, because of the rituals and incantations necessary to the proper conduct of the role. For this reason, women must be excluded from the 'professional' or 'scientific' class of doctors but this does not mean we should exclude them from the traditional roles of folk healers, nurses and midwives, all of which require some sort of training as well as innate common sense. In fact, the traditional roles of wife and mother include the job description of 'healer' and 'nurse', for the care of sick family members routinely falls to the women of the household.[2]

The study of Hittite texts provides us with some interesting parallels to interpreting the phenomenon of folk healing by women in Israel. These texts also point to an important connection between the wisdom traditions of cuneiform societies, where wisdom is more tied to incantational and magical rites, and less so to the literary and practical 'clan' wisdom traditions as they were known in ancient Israel.[3] In the

1. Harris, 'Female Sage', pp. 11-12, 15-16.

2. S. Sharp, 'Folk Medicine Practices: Women as Keepers and Carriers of Knowledge', *Women's Studies International Forum* 9 (1986), pp. 243-49.

3. These texts are not always as accessible as one would wish, but as a starting place, see G. Beckman's 'Proverbs and Proverbial Allusions in Hittite', *JNES* 45 (1986), pp. 19-30; A. Ünal, 'The Role of Magic in Ancient Anatolian Religions according to the Cuneiform Texts from Bogazkoy-Hattusha', in Prince T. Mikasa (ed.), *Essays on Anatolian Studies in the Second Millennium BC* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988); O. Gurney, *Some Aspects of Hittite Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); and Fontaine, 'Queenly Proverb Performance', pp. 95-126, and 'Heifer'. *BA* 52.2-3 (1989) is devoted entirely to the Hittite empire

rituals of the Hittite wise women, we find the missing link wherein 'proverbial' phrases and images, the tokens of the sages' art in Israel, are wedded to the magical rituals of Mesopotamia and Anatolia to restore health and harmony.

Hittite wise women or 'Old Women' (literally, MI.ŠU.GI; Hittite: ḫaššawa) are first attested in the reign of Ḫattušili I, and appear to be associated with the old village power bases among the Hattians, the indigenous people of old central Anatolia. Hittite kings tended to become nervous if their palace women had too much contact with these tradents of the older order. The MI.ŠU.GI performed far more healing rituals than any of the other class of Hittite ritual personnel, and were in constant contact with ritual impurities among those they treated. (One wonders how this might have affected their status.) In modern terms, their work encompassed pediatrics, sex therapy, psychology, grief therapy and applied linguistics. Whether it was the proper ritual treatment of royal bones or a common household quarrel, these women were on duty, practicing their craft, burying angry words and turning sorcerous[1] assaults back onto their senders. One of the healing agents in their metaphorical 'black bag' was the proverbial phrase that linked set ritual action to the context in question.[2] The basic formula was 'Just as X in the natural world happens, so also may X happen in this life.' An example from Tablet 4, ll. 7-14 of 'The Hittite Ritual of Tunnawi', which is directed toward—among other evils—the cure of infertility, reads as follows:

> ... Then she seizes the horn of the fertile cow, and she says: 'Sun-god, my lord, as this cow is fertile, and she is in a fertile pen and she is filling the pen with bulls and cows, just so let this sacrificer be fertile; let her just so fill her house with sons

and makes a good entry point for those interested in this culture.

1. 'Sorcery' is the term usually given by anthropologists to magic practiced for illicit purposes. In fact, sorceresses and wise women appear to have used many of the same ritual methods, but for different ends.

2. Ünal ('The Role of Magic') lists 106 proverbial phrases embedded within ritual texts using analogical magic; not all are from rituals recorded from the wise women, but many are. In particular, one wonders if our wily women of 2 Samuel had a copy of KUB XIII 3, because the proverbial phrases using water are a wonderful match.

> and daughters, grandchildren and great grandchildren, descendants in successive generations!' Then they drive the fertile cow back to the pen.[1]

Keen observation of natural phenomena undergirded these Hittite wise women's practice of medical magic; this is one place where we may observe nature wisdom—the zeal for cataloguing—married to ritual practices. Even sharper assessments of the appropriate use of such observations in context allowed these wise women to make a metaphorical 'match' between the action in their proverbial phrase, now enacted in ritual form before the sufferers, and the hoped-for goal in the sufferers' lives. In other words, in this paradigm of proverbial action, 'proverb performance'[2] moves from the citation of traditional wisdom to characterize or resolve social ambiguities to a ritualized, formal act whose goal is the same—the restoration of harmony. If a parable might be considered a proverb with a plot-line, then the rituals of the Hittite wise women are proverbs with props and stage direction. The Hebrew word for 'proverb', *māšāl*, carries two meanings, both reflected in the work of these wise women. First, *māšāl* means 'to be similar to' and, secondly, it carries the meaning of 'to rule over'. Every proverb encompasses these two ideas, encapsulating events to which the proverb is 'similar', and thus allowing its users to 'rule over' any situation in which they find a similar set of circumstances in action. In these Hittite healing rituals, the *māšāl* observed becomes the *māšāl* enacted, restructuring reality along the lines indicated in the proverb's similitude, and thus 'ruling over' it.

Though there is little explicit mention of wise women healers in the Hebrew Bible, some intriguing clues are present to suggest this ongoing role for women in the world of folk wisdom. Midwives appear in Gen. 35.17, 38.28 and are key characters in outwitting Pharaoh in Exodus 1. Within these stories, midwives execute the (semi?-) legal functions of pronouncing the child

1. A. Goetze, with E.H. Sturtevant, *The Hittite Ritual of Tunnawi* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1938), pp. 21-23.

2. 'Proverb performance' is the timely citation of a piece of proverbial wisdom in a social interaction in order to evaluate events or influence outcomes. See Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament*.

alive and announcing its sex; where twins are involved, the midwife certifies which child is the elder. The parable of Ezekiel 16 reveals the typical functions performed for the newborn, no doubt also duties of the midwife:

> ... Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites: your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite.[1] As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you out of compassion for you; but you were thrown out in the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born (Ezek. 16.3-5, NRSV).

Female sorcery—the negative use of the powers at the healer's command—is alluded to and roundly condemned in Exod. 22.18, Lev. 20.27, Deut. 18.10, 1 Sam. 28 and 2 Chron. 33.6. The rabbis of the postbiblical period give us the following enigmatic proverb from the Mishnaic Tractate *Pirke Abot* ('Sayings of the Fathers'): 'More women, more witchcraft' (2.8; נשים, מרבה כשפים: מרבה).[2] Although the varieties of magical practitioners excoriated in our texts do not include the healer, it is clear from the various oblique references scattered throughout the Bible that such roles for women did exist, required specialized training and skill, and were recognized by the people. As always, the healer who fails to heal becomes an easy target for charges of 'malpractice', or sorcery, and studies show that accusations of witchcraft are often the index of social tensions at large.[3] It must be mentioned

1. Given the rather remarkable social status of Hittite women, in practice if not always in law, this pejorative statement by Ezekiel is fascinating. It is repeated in Ezek. 16.45, following Ezekiel's citation of the proverb 'Like mother, like daughter', to characterize the evils of Jerusalem. One wonders if the phrase 'Your mother was Hittite' is also a משל, here used to express the author's discomfort with Jerusalem escaping from the control of its husband-god.

2. R.T. Herford, *Pirke Aboth, The Ethics of the Talmud: Sayings of the Fathers* (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), p. 48; although we do not know exactly what the rabbis meant by 'witchcraft', their association of it with the practices of women is indisputable.

3. S.D. Walters, 'The Sorceress and her Apprentice', *JCS* 23 (1970), pp. 27-38.

that it is not only in Israel that the preoccupation with the malevolent use of such skills existed; the Hittites, Egyptians and their Mesopotamian neighbors were obsessed with averting the evils caused by wicked sorcerers.[1]

One more group of skilled or 'wise' women may be mentioned in the public domain of ancient Israel, and their existence points to how flexible the definition of 'wisdom' may have been in actual practice. These are the professional mourning women, known to us from Jer. 9.17, 2 Chron. 35.15, and Ezek. 32.16. These women served an important function in their society, which may be related to those of the diplomatic wise women, midwives and healers, for their work in raising an outcry over the dead expressed their peoples' sense of orderly ritual at important times when the stability of the community had been threatened. Their 'art' or skill required training in the poetic conventions of ritual mourning, which some have related to the high literary traditions of the epic poetry of their neighbors.[2] Hence, they are connected to both the language arts of the wise women of 2 Samuel and the ritual activity of the Hittite MI.ŠU.GI, who performed the funerary activities surrounding royalty. Indeed, the connection of these skilled practitioners to an even more distant past for women's public roles is intriguing.

1. The literature on this subject is extensive. For a discussion of sorcery in Israel with respect to women, see A. Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), pp. 67-77. For parallel cultures, see Walters, 'The Sorceress and her Apprentice'; T. Abusch, *Babylonian Witchcraft Literature: Case Studies* (BJS, 132; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987); *idem*, 'An Early Form of the Witchcraft Ritual *Maqlû* and the Origin of a Babylonian Magical Ceremony', in *idem*, J. Huehnergard and P. Steinkeller (eds.), *Lingering Over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 1-57. Also S. Rollin, 'Women and Witchcraft in Ancient Assyria (c. 900–600 BC)', in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1983), pp. 34-45; M. Vieyra, 'Le Sorcier Hittite', in D. Bernot *et al.* (eds.), *Le Monde du Sorcier* (Sources Orientales, 7; Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 101-25; and D.H. Englehard, 'Hittite Magical Practices: An Analysis' (PhD dissertation, Brandeis University, 1970).

2. Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, pp. 37-38.

In the ancient Sumerian language, we discover that a special dialect, EME.SAL, existed and was spoken only by women, goddesses and eunuchs. This dialect is one associated with the high poetic arts and, in particular, with the laments of the goddesses—and their female devotees—for the dead fertility god who was the yearly partner. When women first 'officially' find their language and raise their voice in public, it is in lament. The mourning women of Jer. 9.12 echo the Ugaritic lament for the fertility god slain by the god of Death who climbs into the palace windows. Clearly, a long history of poetic composition and performance is buried beneath these brief references.

As we look at these three variations on the category of public wise woman—diplomats, healers and professional mourners—we may draw a number of conclusions. First, these women were all 'ritual experts' acting in complex, potentially volatile social situations. Next, deliberate, formalized language acts constituted part of their duties, whether those language acts were the apt citation of proverbs (the wise women of 2 Samuel), healing incantations and pronouncements (midwives and healers), or formalized funeral dirges (professional mourners). In each 'occupation', training of some sort was required, even if that training took place primarily within the family unit. Finally, all of the skills that allowed women to fill these valued public roles originate in the roles attributed to wives, mothers, sisters and daughters within the world of the home (see Figure 1). All of these roles have negative correlates when female action is perceived to be challenging the boundaries of male control.

4. *Conclusions*

We have seen in this brief survey that the wisdom tradition of ancient Israel allowed both private and public expressions of women's competence and contribution to the world of the wise. In many respects, these social roles of women are echoed on the literary level in the twin figures of Woman Wisdom and Woman Stranger. Together these two metaphorical figures embody the social roles, positive and negative, which women filled within society at large and the wisdom movement in particular. While the goddess traditions of surrounding cultures and within Israel

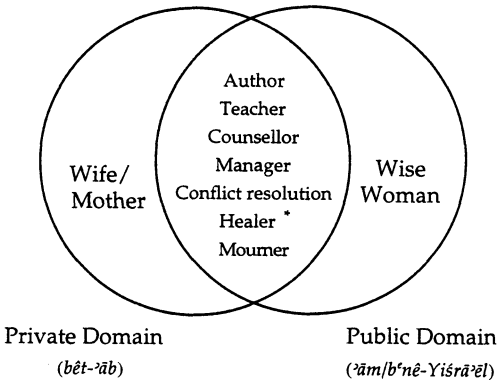
itself may have had a significant impact in shaping the portrait and meaning of these two characters,[1] the actual lived experience of women contributed greatly as well (see Figure 2). In particular, it is important to recognize that the roles played out in the private world of women in the household were a direct source of experience and authorization for much of their power when they moved out into the public arena. In many cases, skills and training directly overlapped, and this fundamental identity was then reproduced and codified in the metaphors of 'womanhood' and women's roles explicated by the sages in the figures of Woman Wisdom and Woman Stranger.[2]

1. See B. Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1986); and C.R. Fontaine, 'The Personification of Wisdom', in 'Proverbs', in J.L. Mays (ed.), *Harper's Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 501-503.

2. I wish to thank Carol Ramsey-Lucas, Lynne Phipps and Rev. Gen Heywood for their technical assistance in the preparation of this manuscript.

Figure 1:
The Social Roles of Women in Israel's World of Wisdom

a. Positive Roles



* Data available from parallel cultures

b. Negative Roles

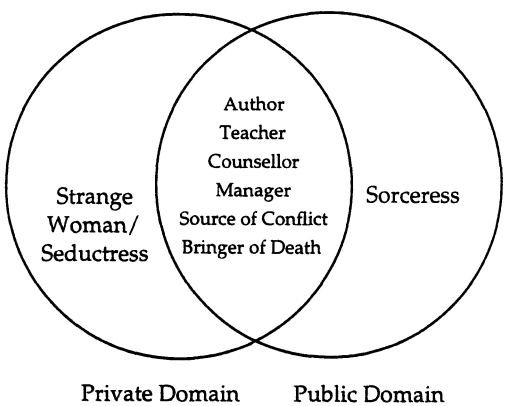
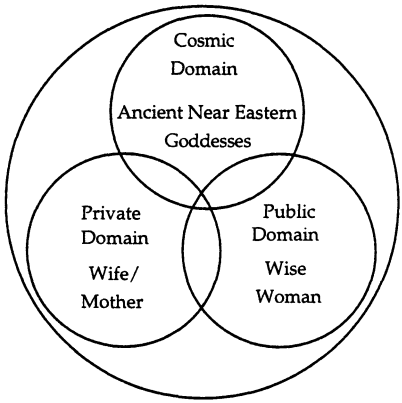


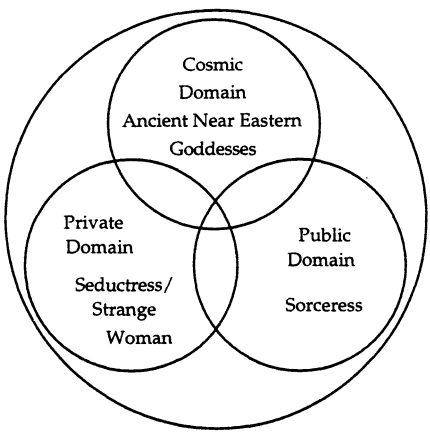
Figure 2:
The Metaphoric Domains of Women's Social Roles in Wisdom

a. Positive Roles



Woman Wisdom

b. Negative Roles



Woman Folly
Woman Stranger

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE FIGURATIONS OF WOMAN IN WISDOM LITERATURE*

Athalya Brenner

When I choose to consider figurations of woman in Wisdom and Wisdom-related texts from a feminist perspective, two questions keep insinuating themselves into my mind. 1. What are the figurations women are imaged (projected) into in this literary genre? 2. Do these figurations reflect male (M) interests, male perspectives, as conceded by feminist and non-feminist critics alike?[1] Or do they also, in some or a number of cases, reflect female (F) interests and perspectives?[2] In short, whose gender ideologies might these images of woman serve? This survey is addressed to these two closely bound issues in the hope of contributing some guidelines towards rereading Wisdom-type biblical texts.

For the purpose of this survey, the descriptive title 'Wisdom texts' will refer to the books of Proverbs, Job and Qoheleth, as

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1. For instance, in C.V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), and in C. Newsom, 'Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9', in P.L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 142-60—both in reference to Proverbs.

2. My terminology is M for male/masculine, F for female/feminine. See further for the terminology and for the gender definition of a text by its perspective or 'signature', 'Introduction', in A. Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), pp. 1-11.

customary in Bible research. In addition, it will include Wisdom-related textual blocks that contain the 'inferior stranger achieves success' Wisdom paradigm—passages from the Joseph story, the book of Esther, and Daniel. In all these texts, apart from Job (which belongs to the same genre by scholarly consent), there obtains a preoccupation with women, femininity and gender relations. This preoccupation with F matters is especially manifest within two loci of these literary discourses:

1. Rhetorical devices: metaphors, hyperboles, similes and repeated idioms.
2. Narrational focalization.[1]

We shall now proceed to examine the material pertaining to F figurations in each of the text blocks listed, bearing in mind that the alleged M discourse in which the figurations feature might perhaps turn out to contain instances of suppressed, misquoted or misread F discourses.

Female Figurations in Proverbs

Biblical scholarship has traditionally defined Proverbs as an M document, presented as recorded speech acts, delivered by M (elder) teachers to M (younger) recipients for the latter's educational benefit. This seems to be strongly implied by the 'father's teaching of son' convention recurrent in it. The curious fact that the book is enveloped at each end by F figurations and metaphors—the זרה[2] woman, Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly at its beginnings, chs. 1–9; the sayings and images of ch. 30, culminating in the instruction of King Lemuel's mother and the Worthy Woman acrostic poem of ch. 31—is almost universally attributed to ambivalent male fascination with females and sex

1. For the concept of 'focalization', the perspectives through which a discourse is delivered by its narrator(s) and figures, cf. M. Bal, *Narratology: An Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1985).

2. The Hebrew term strongly defies translation. It may denote 'foreign' ethnically or, in a more limited sense, socially; 'strange'; 'liminal'; or, much more simply, an 'other'. In order to avoid a clarification of the term, which is not an easy task, I prefer to retain the Hebrew term.

and the utilization of that fascination for didactic purposes. This working hypothesis has heretofore informed most readings of the text, non-feminist and feminist alike. Even Carol Newsom, who illuminates the numerous instances of F discourse in Proverbs 1–9 with great insight, insists that these discourses are 'quoted' within the dominant frame of M discourse.[1] A study made by Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes and myself[2] indicates that, on the contrary, a few grounds can be found in the text for reading at least this 'envelope' or parts of it as echoes of direct (in contradistinction to 'quoted')[3] F voices or discourses. I shall here summarize some of these grounds, or pointers.

A preoccupation with female figures can cut both ways. Whether we interpret this textual attitude as signifying male interest or female interest is a moot point. If it seems simpler, on this count, to dismiss the attempt to gender texts as insignificant or unfeasible, such a critical move would exclude some specific interests that motivate womanly readers of both sexes. Therefore, wherever applicable, both suggestions for gender reading should be offered and presented as possessing equally valid status for the reading procedure.

Attaching gender motivation to positive or negative evaluations of femaleness/femininity, both in evidence in Proverbs 1–9, is not always helpful. I adopt the Hegelian position that stipulates that, within the pattern of master–slave dynamics, collaboration with and defence of the dominant (in this case, M) socio-ethical ideology is often undertaken by the inferior partner (in this case women) even when not beneficial for the latter. F voices can be as critical of their own kind as—and conceivably even more so than—M voices emanating from a text. The passages about the זרה woman and Woman Folly are instructive in this regard. They can be read as an example of the internalization of cultural stereotypes by members of both genders. The

1. Newsom, 'Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom', pp. 142-60.

2. Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*.

3. Admittedly, written literature is, strictly speaking, always 'quoted'. By 'direct' I here imply a focalizing narrator using an F voice, to be distinguished from a narrating M voice that reports F speech and describes F phenomena.

attribution of a gendered 'signature' to a text through an analysis of the seemingly stereotypic role-casting in it may not yield unequivocal results. A loaded attitude can, once again, be interpreted both ways. By itself, a value judgment inherent in the presentations of F figurations cannot serve as a reliable criterion for gendering a text or its focalizer(s).

The warnings against the זרה woman in Proverbs 1–9 (2.16-19; 5.3-14, 20-23; 6.24-26) reach a climax in the dramatic 'story' of ch. 7. This passage is ostensibly a report delivered by an onlooker sitting 'at the window'. That onlooking speaker-in-the-text is commonly identified as a male teacher. Since, apart from Abimelech (Gen. 26.8), in other biblical instances the person at the (latticed) window is always a woman depicted as a wife or mother (Sisera's mother, Judg. 5.28; Michal, 2 Sam. 6.16; Jezebel, 2 Kgs 9.30), there is no reason to assume here that the literary voice of the (maternal) onlooker belongs to a M textual speaker.[1] The attribution of this warning to a F voice is at least as feasible as the usual (M attributed) choice; and may entail considerable significance for the comprehension of some, or all, of the passages dealing with the זרה. It so happens that the vexing problematic of the זרה woman/women is far from being satisfactorily resolved by attributing the image to M voices expressing M fears and a sense of threat.[2] F fears of an Other, an attractive woman, an outsider, might supply as strong, if not a stronger, motivation for this textual figuration.

Other considerations for gendering Proverbs texts link up with the problem of these texts' placement in a conjectured life situation that is perhaps reflected in them to a greater or lesser

1. See van Dijk-Hemmes, 'The I Persona in Proverbs 7', in *On Gendering Texts*, pp. 57-62; and Brenner, *On Gendering Texts*, p. 120. It must be stated, however, that all the female onlookers outside Proverbs are depicted negatively in the texts cited, whereas in Proverbs, according to my interpretation, the proposed F figuration epitomizes positive (maternal, moralistic and moralizing) traits.

2. But cf. Camp's illuminating analyses: 'Wise and Strange: An Interpretation of the Female Imagery in Proverbs in Light of Trickster Mythology', *Semeia* 42 (1988), pp. 14-36, reprinted in this volume; 'What's so Strange about the Strange Woman?', in D. Jobling *et al.* (eds.), *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), pp. 17-31.

extent. There is no scholarly consensus about the educational situation invoked in Proverbs 1–9 and elsewhere in this book, beyond the observation of its configuration as a parent/child relationship.[1] Should this conventionalized description be understood as a metaphorical reference to a 'school' situation? Institutional 'schools' for elite male youth might be conjectured, but ultimately remain within the realm of informed speculation. If the natural locus of education is the home, as reflected in the parent-to-child address, then it stands to reason that references to maternal as well as paternal authority have to be looked for in the text.[2]

In fact, 'mother's instruction' is referred to in numerous passages. Admittedly, within the bound phrase 'father and mother', 'mother' comes second. However, her instruction is certainly invoked. Moreover, the description of Woman Wisdom includes maternal traits,[3] and that of the Worthy Woman, a wife and mother, contains a reference to her 'wisdom' and 'teaching' (חכמה, תורה, Prov. 31.26). It seems that in Proverbs, in addition to the father–son teaching convention, there is also a mother–son (Lemuel's mother, 31.1), perhaps also a mother–daughter, convention.[4] This interpretative option has previously not been

1. See, for instance, M. Haran, 'On the Diffusion of Literacy and Schools in Ancient Israel', in J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume, Jerusalem 1986* (VTSup, 40; Leiden: Brill, 1988); J. Crenshaw, 'Education in Ancient Israel', *JBL* 104 (1985), pp. 601-15.

2. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*. So also C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 152-64. She hypothesizes that both parents were responsible for their children's acquirement of basic learning skills, and that this responsibility extended to parents and children of both genders.

3. Such as feeding, training, primary education and general care. Cf. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, and her 'Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor: A Theological Consideration', in K.G. Hoglund *et al.* (eds.), *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms Presented to Roland E. Murphy* (JSOTSup, 58; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), pp. 56-76. Also see Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, pp. 117-19.

4. The Worthy Woman poem (Prov. 31.10-31) is traditionally understood as M praise for a female paragon of virtue, that is, a good wife and mother by M standards. The collaboration paradigm as well as other literary (and historical) considerations raise the possibility of 'a woman's instruction to daughter' as the genre membership of this poem.

given serious consideration in either ancient or modern biblical scholarship by anyone apart from Claudia Camp and Carole Fontaine.

The imaging of Wisdom as daughter is another pointer in the same direction. It is worth noting how the literary construct of Wisdom as a divine daughter (8.22-31) is contextualized: it is embedded inside the more usual construct of Wisdom as a teacher/mother (8.1-21, 32-36). The 'daughter' construct might be read as an oblique reference to a divinely approved daughterly wisdom (and wisdom in Proverbs is for the most part the product of education). In order to be meaningful for its addressees, the figuration of Wisdom as a heavenly 'daughter' must have evoked an extratextual social context to which they could have related. Whose gender-motivated vested interest is at stake here—especially when viewed against the predominantly disparaging postbiblical, Jewish attitudes toward female learning? The answer is obvious. If we recognize traces of polemics in favour of F education in 8.22-31, with its attribution of divine origin/authority to Daughter Wisdom, this recognition might, for instance, enable us to understand better the process of composition that ultimately produced ch. 8 in its present form.

Inside Proverbs (that is, beyond the boundaries of the book's 'envelope'), the situation is not much different. Woman's domestic roles—wife and mother—are discussed in numerous passages. Exhortations to listen to mother's instruction as well as to father's (for instance, 23.22-25), warnings against the זרה woman (23.27-28), ostensibly misogynistic sayings about women's domestic behaviour (27.15; cf. 19.13b; 21.9), evaluations of F married conduct and instructions aimed at women (14.1)—these and other motifs recur. A worthy woman is her husband's pride and joy (as in 31.10-31), but an unworthy one is his disgrace (11.16a, 22; 12.4). The perspective is always an M perspective; the happiness of finding a suitable spouse is gender-specific; to obtain a good woman/wife is to acquire M happiness (18.22). There are no references to a woman's marital bliss or lack of it, or to a husband's execution of his marital obligations and its consequences for the woman or women in his life. Once more, defining the voice behind these androcentric statements as a F voice is as feasible as defining it as a M one for, in order to

secure a tenuous position in the male order of society (from which they are by definition excluded), women have to adapt to its value system and perspectives.

To conclude: in view of our reconsideration of Proverbs texts which figure woman, it is proposed that they be reread with the dual option of M/F voices, M/F readerly attention, in mind. Although the textual object (addressee) is almost always male, this identification cannot be automatically inferred for textual speaking subjects or their narrating voices. The alternative option of reading a Proverbs text as an F text should be examined alongside the more traditional mode of an M reading. Both modes are equally legitimized by different readerly agendas and concerns. Such a procedure will doubtless prove beneficial for the comprehension of many texts. In particular, it might explain the figuration of Wisdom as woman in all three of the conventional, male-related roles open to her in patriarchal society: a legitimate and loving spouse (4.8), a mother, and a daughter; and it might thus enhance our comprehension of the זרה figuration.

Female Figurations in Job

The female figures in Job have no independent status; their function is to relate to Job as wife and daughters. The wife is nameless, and so, to begin with (1.2, 4, 18), are the daughters. In the Epilogue, however, the new daughters are given names and surprising legal rights (42.13-15).

In the Prologue, Job's wife is given the unfortunate task of suggesting that he ends his misfortune by cursing (or blessing) God and then dying (2.9-10).[1] Job's retort is aggressively vehement: he rejects her suggestion on ideo-religious grounds. She appears, therefore, a foolish and negative foil to her

1. Commentators differ as to the meaning of her suggestion. Does she suggest that Job curse God (understanding the Hebrew ברך as 'curse'), thus provoking God to kill Job? Alternatively, does she suggest that Job bless God, then commit suicide? Since both polarized significations of the Hebrew ברך are used within the Prologue, it is difficult to decide which interpretative option is preferable. The response made by the textual Job facilitates both interpretations.

husband in his total trust in God. Her earthy, materialistic, commonsense attitude is diametrically opposed to Job's spirituality. She emblematizes impatience and emotion; he is an embodiment of pure idealism.[1] In that sense, their confrontation is a repeat performance of the Garden of Eden scene (Gen. 2–3) with a 'therapeutic' twist introduced into it. Contrary to the 'original' scene, here the male is not convinced by the female's initiative. Thereafter the wife ceases to be a speaking subject and is transformed into a spoken-of-object. Within Job's great confession (chs. 29–31), she becomes an object for verbal barter. He swears that if he has committed adultery in deed or in fantasy then, *mutatis mutandis*, his wife should become the sexual property of another, even others (31.9-12).[2] The horror of transgressing patriarchal socio-sexual mores attributed to the textual Job is highlighted by the two classes of taboo females mentioned: virgins (31.1) and married women (v. 9). Thus the nonconformity of the poetic Job in other matters does not pervade his conventionalized and conventional attitudes toward women and sex. It is worth noting that Job's wife is not mentioned again in the Epilogue, although the birth of a compensatory set of offspring might lead us to expect that.[3]

As for Job's daughters, the situation is different. Unnamed in the Prologue, they partake in family occasions like their brothers (1.4, 18). In the Epilogue (42.13-15), the new set of daughters receives names,[4] their physical beauty is singled out,[5] and finally,

1. For the double equation of F = materialism and nature, M = idealism and religion, see V.L. Erikson, 'Back to Basics: Feminist Social Theory, Durkheim and Religion', *JFSR* 8 (1992), pp. 35-46.

2. For the sexual connotations of the 'grinding woman' metaphor, cf. Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, pp. 143-46. Not surprisingly, Job barters his wife off rather than his own self as punishment/expiation for his denied transgressions.

3. Hence, Jewish commentators and other ancient authorities speculate on her identity, to the point of doing away with Job's original wife (as punishment for her sinful, doubting conduct) and supplying him with another.

4. Two of them—קציעה and קרן הפוך— are names for cosmetics, while the third—ימימה—has another connotation and is perhaps related to Ugaritic *yb/mmt l'imm*, 'mistress of peoples'.

5. This feature is, simultaneously, conventional and redundant.

what is even more surprising, their 'inheritance among their brothers' (v. 15) is established by their father.

Why are the daughters' namelessness and relative invisibility reversed, so much so that now we know about them and their status much more than we know about their brothers? This is one of the changes introduced by the Epilogue vis-à-vis the Prologue.[1] We encounter a narrational gap here, to be filled by readers' inferences. The reading of a narrational gap often facilitates more than a single interpretation. For instance, Job the pious (of the frame story) might have become a social reformer. Or, the daughters are juxtaposed with Job's wife, whose absence (justified in terms of her previous behavior according to the story's ideocontents) thus becomes more conspicuous. Or, viewed against the obvious patriarchal background of the narrative, wherein daughters' inheritance is uncommon if not altogether impossible, the detailing of and emphasis on the daughters' inheritance hint at the implicitly deconstructive nature of the Epilogue. I prefer the latter reading for, in my view, Job the pious of the frame narrative (chs. 1–2; 42.7-17) is ironically presented as a parody/satire on the 'true believer' figure.[2] Finally, it is not clear what the daughters' inheritance consists of. In the Hebrew Bible material inheritance for daughters is a rare exception, the case of Zelophehad's daughters (Num. 27.1-11; 36.1-12) notwithstanding.[3] It remains to postbiblical literature to adapt these details to the prevailing social norm. By insisting on the daughters' *spiritual* rather than

Conventional, for women are often praised for their good looks—hence attractiveness—in biblical literature, yet ordinarily the description serves a narrational purpose. Here the description is in a sense redundant, for it serves no overt (descriptive/motivational) narrational purpose.

1. Other changes are the disappearance of the satan and of Job's wife.

2. Cf. A. Brenner, 'Job the Pious? The Characterization of Job in the Narrative Framework of the Book', *JSOT* 43 (1989), pp. 37-52. In my opinion Job's description in the frame story—the cluster of adjectives used, the stereotypical numbers 3 and 7, his unparalleled cultic practice, the prose style—all point to a Job who is an ironical reversal of his counterpart in the poetic sections of the book.

3. Even if we accept this story as a precedent for historical (when?) juridical practice, it is hardly applicable in the present case, since the textual Job has sons as well as daughters.

material inheritance, conformity is re-achieved and social order restored.[1]

Female Figurations in Qoheleth

The worldview advanced in Qoheleth, be it essentially either pragmatic-optimistic or else pragmatic-pessimistic/realistic, or both,[2] is plainly androcentric. The stylistic conventions—the speaking voice is an M voice; the speech is addressed to an M target audience—exclude the possibility of a different reading. Messages (possibly with one exception; see below) are not directed at a mixed or F audience, although many are relevant for the life and thinking of members of both genders.

Androcentrism does not automatically imply misogyny. Yet, the figuration of woman as more 'bitter than death' and as a tempting trap (Qoh. 7.26), presented as a sweeping conclusion from personal experience,[3] is hardly complimentary to a generalized womankind. A further statement, again delivered through the rhetorical convention of first-hand experience, comments that whereas a 'real' man is one in a thousand, 'a woman' (presumably one who is reliable/worthy) is not to be found among those few choice individuals.[4] Even if both sayings

1. So, very clearly, in the *Testament of Job*; cf. P.W. van der Horst, *Essays on the Jewish World of Early Christianity* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1990), pp. 94-110. This text also fills the gaps concerning the disappeared satan and the dismissed wife.

2. See, for instance, R.N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), pp. 61-83, with literature cited.

3. F. Zimmermann (*The Inner World of Qohelet* [New York: 1973]) claims that this and other warnings and views found in Qoheleth stem from the author's unhappy marital experience expressed by the speaker in the first-person mode. It seems that Zimmermann assumes a relatively straightforward relationship between textual 'reality' and the 'reality' of human (whose?) experience. Interestingly (albeit indirectly), his interpretation admits to an M gendered reading and constitutive gendering of the Qoheleth text.

4. My rendering for the non-specific Hebrew text. While it is not clear what the reference is to—human integrity in general? loyalty? trustworthiness? other virtues?—a reading of less (unspecified) than a 1:1000 ratio for female human integrity, perhaps even no human integrity rating for women, makes sense. See further for 7.26-29 in M.V. Fox,

are quotations incorporated into the Qoheleth text (v. 29 reads like a comment on its predecessors; unfortunately, it is not transparent),[1] their misogynistic impact as a component of the Qoheleth text is unmistakable. The recommendation to enjoy life 'with the woman you love' as long as this is feasible (9.9)[2] hardly offsets the previous comments; if anything, it underlines an ambiguity toward woman who, in the Qoheleth discourse, is allowed an object position (both grammatically and topically) but not a subject position. Furthermore, within the textual speaker's declared experience of sexual enjoyment,[3] women are related to as objects. Throughout Qoheleth and 'his' contradictions, this state of affairs never varies.

I have tried to show elsewhere[4] that Qoh. 3.2-8 is a poem (framed by 3.1 and 3.9) whose primary, albeit covert, subject matter is desire, sex and gender relations rather than human time (as it is traditionally interpreted). I also argue that the poem

Qohelet and his Contradictions (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), pp. 241-43. Fox, who emphasizes the rhetorical device of 'Qohelet' speaking as if to summarize 'his experience', does not regard this text as misogynistic. To quote: 'There is bathos in these words: the result of his search in the lofty realms of intellect is just this: a woman is dangerous' (p. 241). Fox apparently means that 'Qohelet' deconstructs 'his' own discourse through this remark. I would submit that at this point Fox's interpretation is in danger of deconstructing itself. Is the result of 'Qoheleth's' quest—the attempt to derive comfort from gender relations—so ludicrous by comparison to 'his' lofty intellectual ideas? Or does Fox mean that finding women *dangerous* is the deconstructive component? If the latter obtains, then I concur.

1. For the practice of quoting in Qoheleth, see R.N. Whybray, 'The Identification and Use of Quotations in Ecclesiastes', in J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume, Vienna 1980* (VTSup, 32; Leiden: Brill, 1981), pp. 435-51; R. Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and his World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 95-108.

2. The Hebrew beyond v. 9a is repetitive and corrupt. Does it condone a monogamic attachment to one woman throughout a man's life? Does it advocate love for a suitable woman as an ideal, the only worthwhile thing in life (so if we follow some versions of the *k*ᵉ*tîb* and read כי היא חלקך בחיים [v. 9b], '*she* [the woman] is your lot in life').

3. If indeed the obscure phrases in 2.8c onwards refer to that; and cf. the commentaries for this passage, especially the Hebrew שדה ושדות.

4. Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, pp. 133-53.

is one of the few biblical instances of M love lyrics, possibly aimed at F recipients. Whybray views the passage differently. He sees it as a list—rather than a poem—which developed gradually, hence the variations in the style and in the significations of some key phrases it contains. He rejects a 'sexual' interpretation for the passage's central verse (3.5) and hence for the whole of it.[1] I am not convinced by some of Whybray's critical decisions concerning the passage. Poetry need not necessarily be precise—variations in significations of the same words or phrases need neither detract from poetic impact nor motivate an ascription to another genre. Repetition is a characteristic feature shared by ancient poetry and lists; therefore its existence within a passage cannot be construed as evidence for genre membership one way or the other. Finally, poetry can be the product of gradual evolvement as much as a list can. In spite of these objections, I accept Whybray's analysis of the passage's composition and structure as a model of erudite and balanced application of scholarly principles.

Female Figurations in the Joseph Narrative, Esther and Daniel 1–6

The Joseph narrative, Esther and Daniel 1–6 are constructed along an almost identical paradigm. This paradigm encompasses the following recurrent motifs. Against initial odds, a Jew/Hebrew rises to political power in a foreign king's court; he is a god-fearing individual; his talents, wisdom and divine inspiration enable a dramatic change in his personal circumstances; he is thus able to help others.[2] These motifs connect

1. R.N. Whybray, '"A Time to be Born and a Time to Die"; Some Observations on Ecclesiastes 3.2-8', in M. Mari, H. Ogawa and M. Yoshikawa (eds.), *Near Eastern Studies Dedicated to H.I.M. Prince Takahito Mikasa on the Occasion of his Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Bulletin of the Middle Easter Culture in Japan, 5; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991). The typescript of this essay was made available to me by Professor Whybray. Since I have not seen the essay as printed, I cannot give detailed page numbers.

2. This paradigm underlines Dan. 1–6. Here, however, I shall limit myself to dealing exclusively with ch. 5, since there are no female figurations in the other chapters.

with sayings in Proverbs and Qoheleth. Instructions on interaction with a king (Prov. 16.10-15; Qoh. 8.2-4) and the ideals of conventional wisdom (Prov. 1.2-7) are central to these narratives. Curiously, all three contain figurations of woman as 'foreign'/Other (זרה), from the viewpoint of the narrator and/or one of the characters. I therefore feel that including these narratives in the present survey is relevant.

There are three F figurations in the Joseph narrative: a mother, a זרה temptress and a wife. The mother is absent though present, dead but influential: Jacob's love for his son Joseph, the love that initiates and motivates the plot, is defined as an offshoot of his love for the dead Rachel. Nothing is reported about Joseph's wife Asenath beyond her name and a statement about her lineage and status as daughter, wife and mother (Gen. 41.45, 50); it remains for extrabiblical literature to develop this male-dependent skeleton of a F figuration into a fuller literary figure.[1] By contrast to the brevity accorded to the mother and wife figurations, a whole chapter depicts the F temptation embodied in the figure of Potiphar's nameless wife.

When we read Proverbs 7 and Genesis 39 as *intertexts*, each of the two texts acquires additional dimensions. Differences exist, of course. For instance, Potiphar's wife fails in her project while the זרה woman apparently succeeds in implementing hers; cultic overtones may be present in Proverbs 7 (v. 17) but are totally lacking in Genesis 39. The basic paradigm is nevertheless similar. A nameless married woman desires a young man. The husband is absent. The woman initiates action. She tries to seduce the young man. She does so by speech acts rather than by reliance on her looks—her physical appearance is not reported.[2] She has

1. In *Joseph and Asenath* she is accorded subject status: her emotions are fictionalized and her own 'story', totally absent from the biblical text, is created.

2. Apart from in Prov. 6.25. As for Potiphar's wife, we are free to fill in the missing details—attractiveness, appearance, age, motivation—according to our personal inclinations. This process of filling in is an integral part of the reading process; our interpretation of the story as it unfolds depends on our decision regarding the woman's age. Is she older than Joseph, thus taking double advantage of his inferior social position? Younger, which would make for a totally different reading? Of the same age, which has other repercussions altogether? And so on,

lust, to be distinguished from love, in mind. There is a seduction scene of sorts. Be the male victim willing (Proverbs) or reluctant (Genesis), his interacting with the woman is detrimental to his well-being: the young fool's fate is a certain death: he will descend to the Sheol that awaits him (Prov. 7.23-27); and Joseph finds himself descending into prison (Gen. 39.20). In both passages, the woman's narrated behaviour and speech acts are construed as an affront to the societal norms prescribed by M marital/moral/religious/sexual codes (Prov. 7.10-13; Gen. 39.8-10). Significantly, the figuration of the זרה seductress is similar in both passages. Significantly, the desired male's conduct is the narrated variable factor that effects a different outcome in each text. Unlike his intertextual counterpart, Joseph does not succumb to the woman's advances. The reward for this restraint as well as for his other virtues is great indeed.[1] Joseph's apparent descent (into prison) is the beginning of his ascent (to fame and influence). Prudence, a virtue much extolled in Proverbs, is wisdom. Genesis 39 reads, then, as a counterfoil to Proverbs 9. Both texts are equally didactic. The latter provides a negative lesson, the former a positive one. The two texts, each with a male protagonist compromised by an intrusive, uncontrolled and uncontrollable F Other at their centre, are true companion pieces.[2]

In the book of Esther there are three figurations of woman. All

inasmuch as other 'missing' details are concerned.

1. The Joseph story may also be considered a Wisdom-type narrative because in chs. 37, 39–41 it charts the internal and external journeys travelled by a young, indiscreet 'fool' toward the maturity, selfhood and 'wisdom' that are the prerequisites for his future success (as in Proverbs). The encounter with the temptress looks like an integral stage of this mythic/mythological journey—as in many other myths, and as recognized by rabbinic Midrash for ch. 39. Cf., for instance, *Bereshit Rabbah, Midrash Tanḥuma, Midrash Ha-Gadol,* and *Yalkut Shimo'ni* for this chapter, and also Joseph's Testament in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

2. For a feminist counterreading of Gen. 39 and some extrabiblical sources that refer to it, see A. Bach, 'Breaking Free of the Biblical Frame-Up: Uncovering the Woman in Genesis 39', in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (The Feminist Companion to the Bible, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 318-42.

three depict woman as wife: Vashti, a 'bad' wife, Esther, a 'good' wife, and Zeresh, a model wife, a wise and knowing companion to the wrong husband.

Vashti and Esther are configured as opposites. Vashti is a disobedient wife.[1] Her punishment is to lose all and be dismissed from the story. Chapter 1 emphasizes that Vashti's fate is to serve as warning for all women to obey their husbands. Although not a central theme, this warning betrays a deeply rooted patriarchal worry. Ironically, Vashti's substitute Esther disobeys the king in coming to see him unbidden (4.11; 5.1-2). Esther exploits her sexuality in order to manipulate the king into giving her what she is after. Mordecai virtually pushes her into the foreign king's bed by forbidding her to disclose her national origin (2.10, 20).[2]

And yet, neither Mordecai nor Esther is criticized for their obvious disregard for morality and sexual norms. Why, then, does Esther—certainly a זרה woman in the king's court, and evidently a skilled manipulator of male sexuality and judgment—receive a better treatment than Vashti and their F counterparts in Proverbs and Genesis? Perhaps because she practises her sexual manipulations discreetly rather than publicly, and on her husband only; or because of her obedience to

1. For an early feminist reading of Vashti's refusal to heed the king's bidding and come to him, cf. E. Cady Stanton (ed.), *The Woman's Bible* (New York: European Publishing House, 1898), Part II, pp. 85-88. To quote: 'Vashti stands out a sublime representative of self-centred womanhood. Rising to the heights of self-consciousness and of self-respect, she takes her soul into her own keeping, and though her position both as wife and as queen are jeopardized, she remains true... ' (p. 88).

No reason for Vashti's refusal is supplied by the MT. Hence, her disobedience seems all the more arbitrary. This narrational gap (omission?) serves the patriarchal concern underlying the story well. In the case of a wife's disobedience, no reasons are relevant. Vashti's refusal, within the ideocontents of the story, is sufficient reason for her dismissal in favour of a more suitable successor. The rabbinic speculations on the reasons for Vashti's refusal are amusingly fanciful but have no basis in the biblical text. Furthermore, they miss the point. Gap-filling at this juncture would obscure one of the story's concerns.

2. Esther's daughterly obedience to Mordecai, her adoptive 'father', is throughout one of her sterling virtues.

Mordecai and loyalty to her ethnic source group. Ultimately Esther too disappears from the story when her task is accomplished. Having been used by men to cater to their ambitions and plans and to realize them, she exits the stage after her mission is accomplished, leaving Mordecai and Ahasuerus to run the kingdom (ch. 10). Thus are M proprieties observed. Whether Esther is a role model for F readers, feminist or otherwise, to emulate remains a matter of personal sensibility.

In Daniel 5 the foreign king commits sacrilege by using the Jerusalem Temple utensils during a feast (vv. 1-4).[1] Nobody understands the writing on the wall. Everybody, including the king, is horrified, frightened, powerless to do anything (vv. 6-9). The unnamed[2] queen is the only intelligent person around. She quietly and tactfully suggests that Daniel be sent for in order to solve the mystery, and her counsel proves sound (vv. 10-12). Her conduct stands in stark contrast to that of the males around her, her royal spouse included. Is she given the gift of unhysterical counsel in order to highlight the stupidity of her fictive husband and his companions, who—to their shame—behave like stereotypic frightened women, and therefore need a woman's wisdom to reorient them? Be that as it may, the queen's figure is reminiscent of the Wisdom figure in Proverbs and the 'wise woman' figures of 2 Samuel 14 and 20. Thus, at the end of our survey we once more encounter two figurations of woman that are central to Proverbs—Woman Wisdom and the זרה woman. This time, however, the two figurations are fused. A זרה woman is depicted as a true marital helpmate, 'wise' in the Proverbs sense. And this leads us back to the discussion (not undertaken here) about the wisdom traits ascribed—unwittingly(?) but certainly ambivalently—to the זרה woman, and the potential of

1. Is there a hint for something more sinister than a regular banquet or feast, with a strong element of sexual licence? The presence of 'women and concubines' (Aramaic: שגלתה ולחנתה), which is emphasized by repetition (vv. 2, 3), is suggestive for such an interpretation.

2. Once more a 'foreign' woman remains unnamed, although her fictive husband is named. It is worth recalling that this convention of unnaming recurs also in Prov. 7 and Gen. 39.

these traits for clarifying the (gender) motivation and sense that underline this important F figuration.[1]

1. Cf. Camp, 'Wise and Strange'. This study was written in Utrecht, The Netherlands, where I spent six months as Belle van Zuylen Professor in the Faculty of Theology, University of Utrecht. My thanks to the staff and faculty members, who made my stay pleasant and conducive to work.

WISE AND COUNSELLING WOMEN IN ANCIENT ISRAEL: LITERARY AND HISTORICAL IDEALS OF THE PERSONIFIED *ḤOKMÂ*[*]

Silvia Schroer

1. *Feminist-Christian Interest in Personified Wisdom*

Mary Daly's famous dictum 'As long as God is male, man is God' epitomizes radical feminist criticism of God's Jewish-Christian image. Many Christian women in the USA and in Europe are no longer satisfied with small reforms in liturgy and some superficial cosmetics concerning the dominant male image of God in theology as well as the church. Women's departure from the traditional church continues; new religious communities of women are being formed, pronouncing their sympathy for matriarchal goddesses or other models of feminine spirituality. In a statement on the position of feminist theology, Marie-Theres Wacker emphasized precisely this uncompromising value of critiques of God's prevailing image. However, for many good reasons Wacker and others doubt that their retirement from church and religious community would furnish an adequate solution to the conflict.[1]

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1. M-T. Wacker, 'Gefährliche Erinnerungen: Feministische Blicke auf die hebräische Bibel', in *idem* (ed.), *Theologie Feministisch* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1988), pp. 14-58. Cf. *idem*, 'Die Göttin kehrt zurück: Kritische Sichtung neuerer Entwurfe', in *idem* (ed.), *Der Gott der Männer und die Frauen* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1987), pp. 11-37; and 'Matriarchale Bibelkritik: ein antijudaistisches Konzept?', in

Is there another alternative? Or, to put it more bluntly: is there an authentic Jewish-Christian spirituality which is compatible with women's experiences and the epistemology of feminist theology? Does such a spirituality exist at all?

For some time now, there has been an increase in the number of works in feminist theology in which Sophia, biblical Wisdom, is looked upon as the answer to this question and a still untapped potential for new feminist-Christian spirituality. The main interest in Israelite Wisdom is obviously based on the fact that the personified *ḥokmâ* is the one and only acceptable feminine image of God in ancient Israel, although it is a post-exilic figure; and this figure, without any doubt, has incorporated elements of goddess cults of the ancient Orient.[1]

Such preoccupation with a biblical figure isolated from its context is, of course, insufficient base for the formation of a new spirituality. The mere fact that Wisdom is represented in the image of a woman or goddess is, from a theological perspective, worthless in itself. Within the *ḥokmâ* context, a critical investigation of the immense hostility against women in some wisdom texts is therefore essential; the values and codes of wisdom doctrines and the androcentric concepts underlying them should be scrutinized as well.

L. Siegele-Wenschkowitz (ed.), *Verdrängte Vergangenheit, die uns bedrängt: Feministische Theologie in der Verantwortung für die Geschichte* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1988), pp. 181-242.

1. Cf. S. Cady, M. Ronan and H. Taussig, *Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), and E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist-Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origin* (London: SCM Press, 1983). Cf. S. Schroer, 'Gott Sophia and Jesus Sophia: Biblische Grundlagen einer christlichen und feministischen Spiritualität', *BLit* 62 (1989), pp. 20-25.

Additional important contributions on personified Wisdom are: D. Georgi, 'Frau Weisheit oder das Recht auf Freiheit als Schöpferische Kraft', in Siegele-Wenschkewitz (ed.), *Verdrängte Vergangenheit*, pp. 243-76; O. Keel, 'Die Weisheit spielt vor Gott: Ein ikonographischer Beitrag zur Deutung der *mᵉ'saḥăqät in Sprüche* 8.30f.', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 21 (1974), pp. 1-66; B. Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1986); U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (OBO, 53; Freiburg/ Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), pp. 508-29.

In the following analysis I would like to offer a small contribution to this feminist-critical investigation which, to a large extent, is still absent from Old Testament criticism. I would like to investigate one of the roles of personified *ḥokmâ*: her place in the literature and life of ancient Israel, that is, Wisdom's role as a wise and counselling woman.

2. *Wisdom: A Counselling Woman*

In Proverbs, Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon personified Wisdom (*ḥokmâ*) is represented in different roles, images or symbols. The *ḥokmâ* is simultaneously a creature of God, co-creator with God, and the principle inspiring the creation and constitution of the universe. She is the love of God, sharing his throne; and the love, wife and sister of wisdom's disciple. She is a hostess who sends messengers out into the street to invite people into her house for a meal. She is a protecting, nourishing tree goddess who blesses the disciples of her wisdom with her fruit. She is a passionate mistress, and a preacher who makes her voice heard in the streets. She counsels kings and men. Thus Wisdom praises herself in Prov. 8.12, 14-16:

> I, Wisdom, dwell in prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion.
> I have counsel (עצה) and sound wisdom (תושיה),
> I am insight (בינה) and I have strength (גבורה),
> By me kings reign and rulers decree what is just,
> By me princes rule and nobles govern the earth

And in Wis. 8.9 Solomon, the patron of wisdom, reports:

> I therefore determined to take her [wisdom] to share my life (αγαγέσθαι πρὸς συμβίωσιν), knowing she would be my counsellor in prosperity (σύμβουλος ἀγαθών), my comfort in care and sorrow.

In these texts the affiliation of counselling Wisdom with kings, princes and rulers is explicit. The close connection between wisdom and counsel (עצה) is stated in many other passages of Proverbs too. For instance:

> My son, be attentive to my wisdom,
> incline your ear to my understanding,
> that you may keep discretion,
> and your lips may guard knowledge (5.1-12).

> The way of the fool is right in his own eyes,
> but a wise man listens to advice (12.15).
>
> Listen to advice and accept instruction,
> that you may gain wisdom for the future (19.20).

ḥokmâ complains several times that her counsel is ignored (Prov. 1.25-30); and in Wis. 9.17 it is stated that God's decree cannot be understood without Wisdom, the holy spirit from above. In many ways the teaching and counselling functions of Wisdom are of course contiguous, as is the nature of things.

The question now arising is: why, in Israelite wisdom literature, could only the feminine *ḥokmâ* assume this counselling role? These wisdom texts, in consonance with Egyptian instances and influence, were transmitted by the king/father to the son as instruction for life; so the counsellor in literary fiction is a man. Also, the profession of counsellor (יועץ) in the Israelite king's court was obviously reserved for men. How, then, can the feminine *ḥokmâ* appear in the role of a woman who counsels rulers? The models of identification in this case obviously originate *not only* from the history of religion. I would like to state explicitly that I do not intend to deny the background influence of the Egyptian Maat on the figure of the counselling Wisdom, since Maat evidently appears as a feminine guide or patroness of rulers. This Wisdom role undoubtedly incorporates influences of the ancient Orient, where quite a few goddesses are known to have functioned as patronesses of kings. Lang, among others, calls attention to this fact.[1]

However, there are also internal Israelite reasons for the development of this image of counselling Wisdom: the extraordinarily steady, historical and literary tradition of counselling women in Israel which Claudia Camp, in her book *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, was the first to investigate intensively.[2] In other words, a set inner-Israelite basis was

1. Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs*, pp. 60-70. Cf. Winter, *Frau und Göttin*, pp. 514-16.

2. (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985). Camp employs literary methods for investigating the relationship between personified Wisdom and other feminine images in Proverbs on the one hand, and older Israelite traditions on the other hand. See in particular pp. 75-147 and 255-82.

necessary for Wisdom to obtain certain goddess characteristics and roles. These inner-Israelite conditions will now be discussed.

3. *Counselling Women in Ancient Israel*

Different types of counselling women are to be found in the Old Testament: 'wise' counselling women, counselling wives, and counselling mothers.

Wise Counselling Women[1]

Apart from prophetic women, the Old Testament also refers to 'wise' women who, in decisive situations, diplomatically interfere in politics and authoritatively influence the way of the world by their counsel.

In 2 Samuel 14 Joab sends to Tekoa to fetch from there a 'wise woman', אשה חכמה, who craftily convinces King David not to banish his son Absalom any more. She proceeds in a manner similar to that exercised by the prophet Nathan who, with the help of a parable, convinces David that he has committed an injustice (2 Sam. 12.1-14). Another woman with the title אשה חכמה hinders Joab from further bloodshed when he lays siege to Abel-Beth-Maacah by negotiating with him from the top of the city wall (2 Sam. 20.15-22). In both cases, 'wise woman' looks like a signifier of status or official position; such women must have had quite a reputation. They know how to employ diplomatic tricks skilfully. It is of interest that both refer to wisdom traditions.[2] The woman of Tekoa reminds David that,

> We must all die.
> We are like water spilt on the ground,
> which cannot be gathered up again;

1. Cf. A. Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), esp. pp. 33-45 for the various meanings of חכם and חכמה as linked to women. In some biblical texts the determinant 'wise' seems to signify professional specialization (as in the case of the 'mourning women') or artisan skill. In such texts the counselling element is not obvious. Therefore, I do not deal with this group of 'expert' women in the following.

2. Cf. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 120-21.

> but God will not take away the life of him
> who devises means not to keep his banished one outcast
> (2 Sam. 14.14).

The wise woman of Abel-Beth-Maacah refers to her town's leading role of direction and counsel in Israel (20.19-20). Both women use all their influence for preserving the life of an individual or a community.

I would like to link these two figures with that of Abigail (1 Sam. 25), although the latter is not called 'wise' explicitly but, rather, טובת שכל, 'of a good mind'; thus she furnishes a contrast when compared with the figure of her husband Nabal, i.e. 'blockhead'. Abigail too strives to save the lives of her household members with diplomatic skill, brilliant rhetoric and a reminder of the Israelite God's stance against superfluous bloodshed. At the same time, she protects the future king from blood guilt.[1]

Another 'wise' woman is Judith, who commands such esteem from the town elders that she can make them come to her, and whose wisdom they duly praise (Jdt. 8.29). The book of Judith beautifully illustrates a feminine image of the first century BCE.[2] In times of national and religious catastrophe, the heroic woman assumes the defence of Israel's existence and employs all the feminine methods at her disposal, albeit with a consciousness of a new exodus according to God's will.

Counselling Wives

Alongside these wise women, whose advice even kings value highly, the Old Testament also contains quite a number of counselling wives. Camp is right in pointing out that the counselling function of a wife in Israel was her most important task apart from her role as housewife.[3] This has hardly been recognized

1. Cf. S. Schroer, 'Abigajil: Eine kluge Frau für den Frieden', in K. Walter (ed.), *Zwischen Ohnmacht und Befreiung: Biblische Frauegestalten* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1988), pp. 92-99.

2. For more details cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, pp. 158-62. It remains for feminist exegesis to research more closely the links between the roughly contemporaneous Wisdom of Solomon and the book of Judith.

3. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 86-90. The distinctions between good and bad counsel or advice, and impulse for activity or seduction respectively, are rejected by Camp with sound arguments.

until recently. Although here and there counsel and action merge, the following are undoubtedly role models or images of women or wives as counsellors. Abraham follows Sarah's advice to beget a son with the slave Hagar (Gen. 16). Rebekah advises Isaac to send Jacob to Mesopotamia in order to find a wife there (Gen. 27.46–28.5). Manoah's wife reacts to God's appearance, which causes her husband mortal terror, with an objective and reasonable explanation of what has happened and of God's will; hers is the last word (Judg. 13.23). Michal gives counsel to David and helps him flee from Saul (1 Sam. 19). Bath Sheba succeeds in convincing David of the legitimacy of Solomon's succession to the throne (1 Kgs 1). Solomon is counselled in the matter of public worship by his wives (1 Kgs 11). Ahab is counselled by Jezebel not to give up Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21). The great woman of Shunem counsels her husband to install an attic for the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 4). Job's wife advises her depressed husband to curse God and die (Job 2.9). Zeresh, Haman's wife, counsels her husband (Est. 6.13). Success links all these women together. There is hardly an instance (excluding Job's case, 2.10) where the husband does not obey his wife, be her advice good or bad.

Wisdom books, especially Proverbs, know what a prudent, sensible woman is worth when she assists her husband with counsel and instruction:

> A good wife who can find?
> She is much more precious than jewels (Prov. 31.10).
>
> She opens her mouth with wisdom,
> and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue (v. 26).

Indeed, in Proverbs various metaphors are employed to compare the wife to the 'wise woman' (חכמה). Both Wisdom (Prov. 3.15; 8.11; Job 28.18) and the worthy wife (Prov. 31.10) are much more precious than jewels. Wisdom (Prov. 4.8-9) as well as the worthy wife (12.4) are the crown of a wise husband, the inspiration and teaching of father and mother (1.8). 'He who finds a wife... obtains favour from the Lord' (18.22), like someone finding wisdom (8.34). A prudent wife is from the Lord (19.14), like wisdom (Ben Sira 1.1). The fame and honour a good wife brings are heard at the town's gate (Prov. 31.31; cf. also

Ruth 3.11), like the rumour about wisdom (Job 28.22) or the voice of *ḥokmâ* crying out in the streets (Prov. 1.21; 8.3). In my opinion, this interchangeability of wife and *ḥokmâ* in metaphoric usage can be interpreted as an allusion to viewing the (wise) wife as representative or personification of Sophia.

In the Wisdom of Solomon the counselling Sophia is represented as Solomon's bride and partner for life and, at the same time, God's love and wife. It is regrettable that translations commonly neglect the restrained erotic terminology of the Greek original, so much so that almost nothing of the actual imagery comes across.

In Ben Sira too we find similar erotic comparisons of wisdom with the wife, the 'woman of youth'. However, the general purport of this book, in as much as the wife's figure is concerned, completely differs from that of Proverbs and the Wisdom of Solomon. Several times beauty is valued more highly than prudence; and a wife's prudence is defined, above all, as speechlessness and respect for her husband. A wife's value here depends exclusively on her being profitable capital for her husband. There is no woman mentioned among the husband's good counsellors in Ben Sira 37.7-18. On the contrary; for instance, men are dissuaded from discussing a second wife with the first wife.[1]

Counselling Mothers of Kings and Commoners

In addition to counselling wise women and prudent wives, there is a third literary model of the חכמה woman, that is, the counselling mother. In Proverbs she is nearly always mentioned together with the father in giving 'instruction' (תורה) to the children. And it seems that in Judah the counselling role helped the king's mother to achieve especial respect, political authority and great influence.

1. The *Sitz im Leben* of the extraordinary—when compared to earlier and later Wisdom texts—hostility to women in Ben Sira has not, in my opinion, received the attention it deserves from feminist-critical exegesis. In this connection see M. Küchler, *Schweigen, Schmuck und Schleier: Drei neutestamentliche Vorschriften zur Verdrängung der Frauen auf dem Hintergrund einer frauenfeindlichen Exegese des Alten Testaments in antiken Judentum* (NTOA, 1; Freiburg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

We know very little about the official position of the *gᵉbîrâ*, 'lady, mistress', from the Old Testament. The early attempts by G. Molin,[1] H. Donner[2] and G.W. Ahlström[3] to acquire deeper understanding by comparative religio-historical methods must perforce be revised—that is, augmented and corrected—and the whole issue examined with feminist considerations in mind.[4] At any rate, according to Niels-Erik Andreasen[5] and other recent investigations, the following points can be made with some confidence.

1. The position of *gᵉbîrâ* is a political one, normally held by the reigning king's mother. According to Jer. 13.18 (cf. 29.2), in Judah both king and *gᵉbîrâ* were crowned.
2. The institution was specifically Judahite, for in the northern kingdom the title was assigned (by the speaking princes) only to the Phoenician princess Jezebel (2 Kgs 10.13).
3. The narrative about the removal of the *gᵉbîrâ* Maacah by her son Asa (2 Kgs 15.9-14) would have us assume that the Asherah cult enjoyed the queen mother's particular protection.[6]
4. A chief task of the *gᵉbîrâ* was to give political counsel to the kings.

This last function is clearly evident in the narrative about Bath Sheba's attempt to exercise influence on Solomon (1 Kgs 2.13-23).

1. G. Molin, 'Die Stellung der *Gᵉbîrâ* im Staate Juda', *TZ* 10 (1954), pp. 161-75.

2. H. Donner, 'Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament', in R. von Kienle *et al.* (eds.), *Festschrift J. Friedrich* (Heidelberg: Winter Universitätsverlag, 1959), pp. 105-45.

3. G.W. Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion* (Horae Soederbloemianae, 5; Lund: Gleerup, 1963), pp. 57-88.

4. Wacker, 'Erinnerungen', pp. 36-37, and esp. Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, pp. 17-32.

5. N.-E.A. Andreasen, 'The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society', *CBQ* 45 (1983), pp. 179-94; Iromi, 'Die Königinmutter und der ʿamm haʾarez im Reich Juda', *VT* 24 (1974), pp. 421-29.

6. Wacker, 'Erinnerungen'; for the Asherah cult cf. S. Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder* (OBO, 74; Freiburg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), pp. 21-45.

After Solomon has been proclaimed king, Adonijah comes to Bath Sheba, the king's mother (who nevertheless is not given the title *g^{e}bîrâ* in the text), and requests that she asks Solomon to give him Abishag the Shunammite for a wife. Adonijah has complete confidence in Bath Sheba's influence on her son: 'Pray ask King Solomon, He will not refuse you' (2.17). The king rises to meet his mother, bows to her, sits on his throne, has a seat brought in for her, and she sits on his right. Nevertheless, and against his initial promise to grant whatever wish she requests, Solomon has Adonijah executed.

Another reference to the influence of the counselling *g^{e}bîrâ* can be found in 2 Chron. 22.3, where the information given about Ahaziah in 2 Kings is expanded by an essential sentence (emphasized below):

> Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, *for his mother was his counsellor in doing wickedness* (כי אמו היתה יעצתו להרשיע). He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, like the house of Ahab has done; for after his father's death they were his counsellors, to his undoing (2 Chron. 22.2-4).

The frightened Belshazzar is advised by the queen, here too probably the king's mother, to get Daniel's assistance for interpreting the mysterious writing on the wall (Dan. 5.10-12). Finally, an enigmatic passage in Proverbs (31.1-9) contains words addressed by an unnamed counselling mother to Lemuel, king of Massa. Although the addressee as well as the localization remain enigmatic, the instruction to the king is without any doubt his mother's. She not only counsels her son to exercise discretion about women's company and alcohol consumption but also, along the lines of the ideal kingship, not to neglect his role as just judge and protector of widows, orphans and the poor.[1]

There are also other instances of the links between the mother's role and counselling, as pointed out already in 1955 by P.A.H. de Boer in a remarkable and inspiring work.[2] De Boer

1. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 199-200, 278-79.
2. P.A.H. de Boer, 'The Counsellor', in M. Noth and D. Winton

examines the meaning of 'counsel', 'counselling' and 'counsellor' in detail. His conclusion is that counsel and wisdom are inseparable; and that, in Israel, the counsel of a specifically authorized person carried the authority of an oracular decision which guarantees the well-being of nation or individual. From the perspective of linguistic usage 'counsel', 'judgment' and 'prophecy' are contiguous. Counselling persons with feasible prophetic talents were probably called 'father' or 'mother' because of those talents. Thus Joseph is 'father' to the pharaoh (Gen. 45.8), that is, he becomes the latter's counsellor. Joash, king of Israel, calls the prophet Elisha 'father' (2 Kgs 13.14; see also 2 Kgs 2.12). The ideal king of Isa. 9.5 is called 'a marvellous counsellor' and אביעד; de Boer translates the last appellative 'father of the future'. Similarly, Deborah is called 'mother in Israel' (אם בישראל, Judg. 5.7). De Boer's interpretation, namely that the title 'mother' signifies a specific role in the case of a woman counselling about Israel's future, is therefore more convincing than the reading of 'mother' in such contexts as an honorific title.[1] Deborah is represented as a wise judge sitting under a tamarisk, and as a prophetess (Judg. 4.4-5). And when Abel-Beth-Maacah, a wise woman's town, is praised as 'a mother in Israel', this means that it is a town of good advice, a place for receiving oracles or where wisdom is generally practised—and by women too.

4. *Counselling Women in Israel: Literary and Historical Images of the Counselling Wisdom*

Let us first state the results of the foregoing analysis. The profession of adviser or counsellor, in the sense of a public officer at the king's court, might have normally been reserved for men only: the application of the technical term יועץ ('adviser') is exclusive to men.[2] But counselling and 'wisdom' were by no

Thomas (eds.), *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (VTSup, 3; Leiden: Brill, 1955), pp. 42-71.

1. De Boer, 'The Counsellor', p. 59. De Boer's proposal was obviously not given the consideration it deserves; cf. Winter, *Frau und Göttin*, pp. 644-48.

2. Cf. THAT, I, p. 750.

means a male-only domain in ancient Israel. Women exercised influence in their patriarchal surroundings, be it in the private or political arenas. Women with prophetic talents, wives and mothers, made claims to maintain their influence and realize it. Counselling women's great authority was evidently not limited to certain social classes. The narratives we have read are set in royal courts as well as in the country. The social location of the 'counselling woman' corresponds to the ubiquity of this type of woman: the evidence extends from the classical biblical period to post-exilic times.

The representation of personified Wisdom as a counselling woman has inner-Israelite sources; that is, it is rooted in socio-cultural factors related to Israelite tradition and history. Old Testament literary feminine figures—reflecting exceptions but certainly also everyday experiences in the people's lives at those times—as well as figures of historically important women of great repute, provided the ideal model for the counselling *ḥokmâ*. I would like to emphasize that, for me, 'ideal' is a significant and meaningful model for historical influence, not necessarily literary dependence of wisdom texts on individual Old Testament narratives. Because Israel acknowledged the existence of literary and historical counselling women, personified Wisdom can assume this role and her religious-historical effect can be acknowledged. Thus wise Israelite women, counselling wives and mothers, referred to *ḥokmâ* and her counsel for hundreds of years; and at the same time they were respected as *her* representatives.

Wisdom personified as a counselling woman was an essential element of the feminine *image* in ancient Israel. In post-exilic times she, together with authentic feminine *experience* and feminine *identity*, had to be integrated into the feminine image of God, Sophia, who represents God's gracious and sociable characteristics in various images, probably offering a possibility for identification for the women of the time. In return, such a divine image might have exercised an influence on women's own position and social reality.

5. *The Socio-Religious Background of Wisdom as Image of God*

Why did such a feminine image of God develop during the post-exilic period? I would like to address this question now, while integrating into the discussion reflections on some issues that go beyond it and require further elaboration.

According to recent work by Albertz,[1] Crüsemann[2] and Kippenberg,[3] the so-called 'wisdom crisis' of ancient Israel was not simply an independent intellectual process. Rather, it arose from a historical crisis grounded in complex political, ecumenical and social factors. This, for us, means that the image of God as Sapienta in post-exilic times must be understood *also* as a reaction to the conditions prevailing during that epoch. In Job the God of Israel admittedly becomes a very distant and nameless God and Wisdom acts as a mediator. But the decisive point is to find the reasons for this development, the links from texts to contexts. The often discussed distance of Israel's God in post-exilic times is viewed by Camp as a result of the disappearance of kingship as a religious-sacral intermediary authority[4]—a truly significant factor, in my opinion. During this period, as in pre-monarchical times, consanguinity, family and household as the place where religion is revealed and practised supplant the function of kingship. In the post-exilic period, as in

1. R. Albertz, 'Der sozialgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Hiobbuches und der "Babylonischen Theoldizee"', in J. Jeremias and H. Perlitt (eds.), *Die Botschaft und die Boten: Festschrift W.W. Wolff* (Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), pp. 349-72.

2. F. Crüsemann, 'Die Unveränderbare Welt: Überlegungen zur "Krisis der Weisheit" beim Prediger (Kohelet)', in W. Schottroff and W. Stegemann (eds.), *Der Gott der kleinen Leute: Sozialgeschichtliche Bibelauslegungen. I. Altes Testament* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag und Buckhardthaus-Laetare, 1979), pp. 80-104; *idem*, 'Hiob und Kohelet: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Hiobbuches', in R. Albertz *et al.* (eds.), *Werden und Wirken des Alten Testament: Festschrift C. Westermann* (Göttingen/Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980), pp. 372-93.

3. H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung im antiken Judäa: Eine religionssoziologische Studie zum Verhältnis von Tradition und gesellschaftlicher Entwicklung* (SUNT, 14; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978).

4. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 227-91.

other non-monarchical times, the household is not only the primary socio-economic unit but also determines the character and identity of social Israelite existence. After the kingship's demise, the alliance between Israel and God is guaranteed by the integrity of the family. This modification in socio-religious context constitutes substantial motivation for the high esteem women enjoy in wisdom literature and for the shift in the contemporaneous image of God. The book of Proverbs ends with praise for the worthy wife (Prov. 31.10-31), considered the source of identity for the entire household. The house is her house; *Shalom* is granted by her work and devotion to God; and personified Wisdom too appears as a house-builder and co-creator. After the exile women helped to reconstruct the community. Like their husbands, they felt responsible for their houses and property (Neh. 5.1-5). Not by chance, already in Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah the mother and the family recover religious significance; and God's image acquires more characteristics relating to family life.[1]

Counselling Wisdom's feminine image has its roots in the household and the family. It acquired significance when Israel no longer had a king and, consequently, no (male) court counsellors. The position of king endowed with wisdom was now taken by *ḥokmâ* herself. She is a universal counsellor, counselling not only the Israelite king but also foreign kings and the legendary King Solomon. According to Camp the importance of the Proverbs counter-image to counselling or teaching wisdom, Woman Foolishness, should be understood against this backdrop.[2] Women must have advised the good and the wicked alike. This state of affairs may have motivated the separation of counselling Wisdom into the duality of 'wisdom' and 'foolishness'. Woman Foolishness is mostly characterized by adultery. She is imaged as a 'strange woman' and follower of forbidden goddesses. The motivation for this development must be closely linked with the separation of Israel from other religious cults and the prohibition of mixed marriages under

1. Cf. the similar conclusions, although differently argued, in E.S. Gerstenberger's interesting booklet, *Jahwe—ein patriarchaler Gott?* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1988), pp. 17-27.

2. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 112-19, 265-71.

Nehemiah, a legal step designed to stabilize the internal law and order of Jerusalem and Judah. Mal. 2.14-16; 3.5 probably reflects the situation in the Persian period: adultery and divorce were on the increase, and so were mixed marriages with foreign women from Ashdod, Moab and Ammon (Neh. 13.23-27). Woman Foolishness—seducer and adulteress, a foreigner and follower of foreign cults—may have functioned as a symbol for the loss of religious and national identity when marriage and the family had to guarantee Israel's identity.

6. *Personified Counselling Wisdom: A Source for Contemporary Women's Identity, and the Future of Feminist-Christian Spirituality?*

I would like to return now to my initial question: does Sophia's role as counselling woman, as analysed above, offer convincing biblically-grounded guidelines for feminist-Christian theology and spirituality? In my opinion, this question must be answered in the affirmative, and for a number of reasons.

1. Feminist spirituality is always anchored in life, that is, human experience, including women's experience.[1] Christian women all over the world *experience* themselves in the role of counsellor and adviser—especially within marriage and the family but also, more and more, in church and politics. They could find empowering and encouraging ideals in the wise women of ancient Israel and in the counselling *ḥokmâ* who, to an amazing degree, raise issues relevant to contemporary women. Wise, counselling women and counselling Wisdom strive for justice and particularly life: the people's lives, the survival of a town or person, the lives of widows and the underprivileged, future life. Simultaneously, it is the experience of ancient and modern women alike that their counsel is ignored by those in power. 'But he who foregoes me injurs himself, all who hate me love death' says Wisdom (Prov. 8.36). When we consider the global patriarchal ideology, this programme for life and against death is almost more relevant now than in biblical times.

2. Counselling *ḥokmâ* is linked to a multi-faceted image of

1. Cf. Cady, Ronan and Taussig, *Sophia*, esp. pp. 1-15.

God. *ḥokmâ* is a creative figure, highly self-conscious, not too shy to praise herself. She can be inflamed with anger; she can insist on teaching her rules. These characteristics hardly correspond to the predominant androcentric images of woman, hence their value for a feminist discussion about the acceptability of alternative feminine images. The mythology integrated into the Wisdom figure—a reflected abundance of images, symbols and characteristics of ancient oriental goddesses—can be helpful.

3. Young Christianity and its Scriptures were influenced by the wisdom image of God in early Judaism to an extent that cannot be overestimated. This is expressly stated by F. Christ,[1] Küchler,[2] Schüssler Fiorenza[3] and others. Jesus and John viewed themselves as messengers of Sophia. The Sophia Christology, which acknowledged Wisdom to reside in Jesus himself, to have been sent by God and rejected by the world and returned to heaven, may have been one of the earliest church Christologies. Many passages in the Synoptic Gospels, long passages in John and nearly all the New Testament letters vouch for a Sophia theology/Christology in the first and second centuries CE. Schüssler Fiorenza shows that this kind of theology made the Christian practice of gender balance possible (cf. Gal. 3.28). Such early Christian understanding of Jewish Wisdom should be exploited by feminist–Christian spirituality. The long-buried tradition ought by right to be called a Jewish as well as Christian tradition.

4. Sophia meets the eminent requirements of Christian men and women for new images; and yet, this remains an odd

1. F. Christ, *Jesus Sophia: Die Sophia-Christologie bei den Synoptikern* (ATANT, 57; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1970).

2. M. Küchler, *Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen: Zum Fortgang weisheitlichen Denkens im Bereich des frühjüdischen Jahwe-Glaubens* (OBO, 26; Freiburg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), pp. 584-86.

3. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*; Schroer, 'Gott Sophia and Jesus Sophia'; *idem*, 'Der Geist, die Weisheit und die Taube: Feministisch-kritische Exegese eines neutestamenlichen Symbols auf dem Hintergrund seiner alt-orientalischen und hellenistisch-frühjüdischen Traditionsgeschichte', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 33 (1986), pp. 197-225.

biblical tradition.[1] She incorporates the Goddess without relinquishing Jewish-Christian monotheism. Like Jesus Christ, she functions as an intermediary authority between God and humankind, heaven and the world. Thus transcendence and heaven are combined with the feminine. Biblical Sophia meets the requirement of feminist theology to integrate human experience instead of sēparating or demonizing parts of it, to search for correspondence and interconnections instead of settling for separation and differentiation. She offers help because she is interactive and open: she contains without imposing limits. In a world where dissension—atom-splitting, dualism, apartheid, sexism, anti-Semitism, East–West–North–South conflicts—threatens our lives day by day this integrative, connective function of a Christian Sophia spirituality looks like a promising road for the future: for a world of justice, peace and respect for creation. Members of the Women Church in the USA have already taken this direction. In Europe, women are taking the first steps toward this new spirituality. Such trends are full of hope. Indeed, let us hope that the wise counsel of such Christian women will not be rejected by responsible (male) church officials, but will be heard in time. Prov. 8.34-35 is for all of us:

> Happy is the one who listens to Wisdom,
> watching daily at her gates,
> waiting beside her doors.
> For the one who finds Wisdom
> finds life and obtains favour from the Lord.

Postscript

This article was first published in 1989. Since then feminist exegesis and theological research on Wisdom have continued. These exegeses and research have confirmed my conviction that Sophia was more a way of speaking about or imagining Israel's God than a true goddess who had her own cult.

My own later work about the Wisdom figure has focused on the book called Wisdom of Solomon. I have tried to point out the links between Sophia and the life of some Jewish women, especially within some monastic groups in Alexandria at the beginning of the Roman era, as

1. See further Cady, Ronan and Taussig, *Sophia*, esp. pp. 76-93.

mentioned by Philo.[1] Another article of mine deals with Wisdom's significance as a contribution to post-exilic forms of monotheism.[2] In another I haven tried to deepen our understanding of the Sophia Christology in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels.[3]

1. S. Schroer, 'The Book of Sophia', in E. Schüssler-Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist-Ecumenical Commentary* (New York: SCM Press, 1994), 2, pp. 17-38.

2. S. Schroer, 'Die göttliche Weisheit und der nachexilische Monotheismus', in M.-T. Wacker (ed.), *Der eine Gott und die Göttin: Gottesvorstellungen des biblischen Israel im Horizont feministischer Theologie* (OD, 135; Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1991), pp. 151-82.

3. S. Schroer, 'Jesus Sophia: Beiträge der feministischen Forschung zu einer frühchristlichen Deutung der Praxis und des Schicksals Jesu von Nazaret', in D. Strahm and R. Strobel (eds.), *Vom Verlangen nach Heilwerden: Christologie in feministisch-theologischer Sicht* (Fribourg/Luzern: Exodus Verlag, 1991), pp. 112-28.

WHO IS *ĒŠET ḤAYIL* IN RABBINIC LITERATURE?

Shulamit Valler

The *ēšet ḥayil* ('virtuous woman') poem of Prov. 31.10-31 presents a model for an ideal woman. This woman has many fields of activity, some of which are customarily attributed to the male/masculine domain, such as negotiation over the requisition of land or administration of trading relations abroad. However, the two crucial elements which identify 'her' as an ideal woman are the following:

1. Her activity aims at establishing economic security and well-being for her husband and children, from whom she gains approval and praise. The center of her life is her home and, even though her activities extend outside the home as well as inside, she makes no use of her skills for the benefit of her community or nation.
2. Even though the poem presents the differentiation of gender roles in a manner almost diametrically opposed to the conventional one (i.e., the wife is active and the husband is passive and protected), he is her superior and her will to gain his praise apparently motivates her behaviour as narrated (v. 28).

These two points which stand out in the *ēšet ḥayil* poem are also predominant in the concept of the ideal wife in rabbinic literature. Throughout this literature the domestic model of the ideal wife, who excels in vigor and talent but contributes them only to the welfare of her family and the domestic comfort of her husband (whose status is higher than hers), is a recurrent and common format.

I have decided to check for any departures from this model in

the sages' homilies about *ēšet ḥayil*—deviations which present a different female/feminine ideal.

Rabbinic Sources on the ēšet ḥayil

In rabbinic literature there are three anthologies of homilies that interpret Prov. 31.10-31 in consecutive order: *Midrash Mishle,*[1] *Midrash Eshet Hayil,* and *Midrash Tanhuma. Midrash Mishle* and *Midrash Eshet Hayil* were probably compiled quite late. In her comprehensive research on *Midrash Eshet Hayil,* Yael Katz-Levine[2] says that it was an independent midrash later attached to *Midrash Mishle,* and that both of these midrashim were created in the thirteenth century.

In these two anthologies the verses of Prov. 31.10-31 are interpreted as descriptions of different women in the history of the Israelite nation, while in *Midrash Tanhuma,* which was edited in the ninth century, all the verses of the passage are explicated as descriptions of different deeds of one biblical woman: Sarah.

Midrash Mishle is the largest although not the oldest anthology. I therefore chose to use its homilies as the point of departure for this study. However, I shall also discuss the relevant homilies in *Midrash Eshet Hayil* and *Midrash Tanhuma.*

A large portion of *Midrash Mishle* deals with the interpretation of the expression *ēšet ḥayil* as metaphor for either the Torah or its scholars, or the people of Israel, or male characters in Israelite history. I will not discuss this midrashic portion because it is irrelevant for my study. Another part of the midrash identifies *ēšet ḥayil* as R. Meir's wife, and praises her performance of conventional womanly tasks, that is, caring for her husband's well-being and creating circumstances which relieve him of daily burdens and leave him to his spiritual life. I shall not discuss this part either, even though it clearly demonstrates the sages' concept of an ideal wife. The rest of the midrash deals, as

1. The edition I used is B.L. Visotzky, *Midrash Mishle: A Critical Edition Based on Manuscripts* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1983).

2. Y. Katz-Levine, *Midrash Eshet Hayil* (PhD dissertation; Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel, 1994; in Hebrew).

already mentioned, with identifying the *ēšet ḥayil* of Prov. 31.10-31 with prominent female figures in the history of ancient Israel. From among the homilies of this part of the midrash, I intend to focus on items which identify *ēšet ḥayil* with women whose actions are significant for the women themselves, not simply because of their contribution to the welfare of significant male figures. It is not my intention to discuss identification of traits or actions which are commonly imaged as female/feminine. Therefore I will analyse neither midrashic segments which identify *ēšet ḥayil* with well-known childless women who later became famous mothers, nor segments which identify *ēšet ḥayil* with women who merely assist and support famous men.

The three anthologies of homilies about the *ēšet ḥayil* poem are relatively late. Therefore, if one wishes to uncover homilies which reflect the ideas of earlier sages (Tanaim and Amoraim), one has to find the sources of those homilies in the Talmud, or in earlier midrashic collections. I myself have found that only few, specifically four, homilies on *ēšet ḥayil* derive from early sources: in most of these, the homily is attributed to an early, named sage. I focused on these homilies in order to find out as many things as I could about the concepts of ideal womanhood reflected in the early sources.

A Wife's Spiritual Equality: The Case of Sarah

The first relevant homily in *Midrash Mishle* is found in par. 9:

> 'How hard it is to find a venerable wife' (Prov. 31.10)—'That still bare fruit in old age and are always green and strong' (Ps. 92.14). It is said about Abraham and Sarah who were equal in charity and benevolence, and were [together] a good sign to the world. So the Lord does not ignore righteous, proper wives whom he paired with them. So have we found about Noah's wife that her deeds were equal to his and, therefore, she was as fortunate as he was and was saved from the water of the flood.

There is no doubt that spiritual equality between husband and wife is implied here, although other sources mutate this principle of spritual equality into something more gender-stereotypic.[1] However, spiritual equality between Abraham and

1. In *Midrash Eshet Hayil*, par. A, *ēšet ḥayil* is Noah's wife, who did

Sarah in this midrash seems to be revealed already in earlier midrashic sources which reflect the same idea.

An early source which presents Abraham and Sarah as equals is found in a Tanaitic midrash in the *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*.[1]

> ...so you can find in Abraham that in the beginning he was called Abram and after he had done good deeds they added one letter to him and his name was called Abraham, and so you can find in Sarah that in the beginning she was called Sarai and after she had done good deeds they added one bigger letter to her and her name was called Sarah.[2]

In Amoraic literature Sarah is represented as above Abraham in spiritual qualities. In *b. Sanh.* 69b[3] it is stated,

> Rabbi Isaac[4] observed: Ischa was Sarai and why was she called Ischa? Because she foresaw [the future] by holy inspiration, hence it is written 'In all that Sarah said to you listen to her voice'.[5]

And in *b. Meg.* 14a and *Gen. R.*[6] 45a,

> 'And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai' (Gen. 16.2). R. Yose[7] says: It was to the voice of the holy spirit, in line with the following verse, 'Now therefore hearken to the voice of the words of the Lord' (1 Sam. 15.1).

The representation of Sarai as a female figure who delivers God's intentions to Abram places her on a higher spiritual plane

not sleep with her husband during the days of the flood. Here, then, the idea of spiritual equality is changed into the common view of females having a strong sexual drive yet nevertheless being required to help the male maintain his spirituality.

1. J.Z. Lauterbach (ed.), *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (Cincinnati: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1949).
2. *Mekilta*, Amalek-Yitro 1.
3. I used I. Epstein (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino Press).
4. A Palestinian Amora of the second and third generations, i.e., the beginning of the fourth century.
5. Gen. 21.12.
6. The edition used is J. Neusner (ed. and trans.), *Genesis (Bereshit) Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary on the Book of Genesis. A New American Translation* (BJS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).
7. A Palestinian Amora of the fourth generation.

than him and, indeed, Sarah is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud as one of seven woman prophets.[1] An extreme expression of the spiritual superiority attributed to her is recorded in *Gen. R.* 47a, in a debate between Rav Aha, a Palestinian Amora of the fourth generation, and some anonymous sages about the connection between verses from Gen. 17.15-16 and Prov. 12.4. This is the debate:

> 'And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name"' (Gen. 17.1). 'A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband' (Prov. 12.4). Said R. Aha, Her husband was crowned through her, but she was not crowned through her husband. The rabbis said, She was master of her husband. In every other context the man gives the orders. But here, 'In all Sarah says listen to her voice' (Gen. 21.12).

Both sides in this debate agree about Sarah's superiority, but Rav Aha seeks its expression in the spiritual domain whereas the rabbis seek it in the practical world.

Further on in this midrash, there are two Tanaitic quotations in which Sarah is highly praised by two disciples of Rabbi Akiva.[2]

> Said R. Joshua B. Qorha: The ·[3] that the Holy One blessed be he took away from the name of Sarai was divided half to Sarah and half to Abraham. Said R. Shimeon Bar Yohai: The · that the Holy One took away from the name of Sarai went fluttering above before the Holy One blessed be he, saying, Lord of all ages, because I am the smallest of all the letters you took me out of the name of that righteous woman? Said the Holy One, Blessed be he, to it: In the past you were in the name of a woman and at the end of the name's letters. Now I shall put you in the name of a male, and the first letter of his name. 'And Moses called Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua'[4] (Num. 13.16).

And in the last paragraph of this midrash R. Mana, a

1. *B. Meg.* 14a.

2. At the beginning of *Gen. R.* 40.1 a Palestinian Amora of the third generation explains Sarah's childlessness as a spiritual quality too.

3. The Hebrew letter which is 'taken away' in favour of the Hebrew letter ה when Sarai's name is changed to Sarah.

4. Joshua's name יהושע begins with the same Hebrew letter that stood at the end of Sarai's (שרי).

Palestinian Amora of the fifth generation, says:

> In the past she [Sarah] was princess for her own people; now she will be princess for all humankind.

Those Talmudic and midrashic quotations may be concluded by saying that the idea of Sarah being equal with Abraham or even surpassing him in her good qualities and deeds has a solid foundation in the sages' world. It therefore seems possible to find sages who were not fixated on conventional gender traits and characteristics. Those sages were able to ascribe qualities usually considered male and, furthermore, qualities that set men and women apart, to certain female figures. Those sages did not hesitate to raise the spiritual status of a certain female figure above that of the male to whom she was compared. It is worth noting in this context that in the midrash quoted the male figure is the nation's father Abraham, whose actions the sages always attempt to depict as positive. The placing of Sarah above Abraham shows the liberality of those sages, who allowed themselves to express a concept different than the commonly held one in the matter of women's duties and attributes and, consequently, in the matter of the relative places and roles Abraham and Sarah had in 'their' world.

Interestingly, all three midrashic anthologies on *ēšet ḥayil* connect the verse 'Her husband puts his confidence in her' (Prov. 31.11), with slight variations, to Sarai and Abram at the gates of Egypt and Abram's request of his wife to pass herself off as his sister at the pharaoh's house (Gen. 12.10-20). In *Midrash Tanhuma* the biblical verse is linked with the beginning of the incident and Abram's request to Sarai, 'Tell [the Egyptians] that you are my sister' (12.13). If Abram had not trusted Sarai as a person and a woman, he would have neither trusted her with such a secret nor consented to her staying in the Egyptian king's house. In *Midrash Eshet Hayil* the verse is interpreted as a hint to that incident too. In *Midrash Mishle* the verse is linked with the outcome of the same narrative.

The point common to all three midrashic sources is that the man depends on his wife and benefits from her tribulations. This point is futher developed in *Gen. R.* 40.5 by R. Pinehas (a Palestinian Amora of the fourth generation) in the name of R. Abun (a Palestinian Amora of the third generation). R. Pinehas

emphasizes Sarah's superiority and supremacy in ancient Israel's history.

> R. Pinehas in the name of R. Abun: Two men had a principal role but treated themselves as subordinates—Abraham and Barak. Barak—'and she sent and called Barak...and Barak said to her, "If you go with me, then I will go; but if you do not go with me, then I shall not go"' (Judg. 4.3).

Abraham humbled himself in a similar manner. The midrash now continues with explications of the conditional clause in Barak's statement, as quoted (Judg. 4.3).

> R. Judah said [that Barak meant], If you go with me to Kadesh, I will go with you to Hazor; but if you do not go with me to Kadesh, I will not go with you against Hazor. R. Nehemiah said [that Barak meant], If you go with me in song, I will go with you to battle. And she [Deborah] said: 'I will surely go with you notwithstanding that the journey you take shall not be for your honour' (Judg. 4.9).
>
> Said R. Reuben, The word for 'notwithstanding' is a Greek word that stands for 'let alone'. So the sense of what she said to him was this. What do you now suppose? That the glory of the song will be handed over to you for a blessing? So he [Barak] turned out to be the subordinate: 'Then sang Deborah, and Barak the son of Abinoam' (Judg. 5.1).
>
> Abraham held the principal role but treated himself as secondary: 'Say you are my sister' (Gen. 12.13). And as a result he was made subordinate—'And he [the pharaoh] dealt well with Abram on her [Sarai's] account' (12.16).

The analogy drawn between Deborah and Barak on the one hand and Abraham and Sarah on the other hand clearly indicates R. Pinehas's intention to represent Sarah as a 'super-woman' who far exceeds her male partner in spirit, courage and leadership. Deborah's supremacy over Barak in 'song' (prophecy), judgment and leadership is well-documented. By comparing her to Sarah R. Pinehas indicates that Abraham was secondary to Sarah not only on the occasion discussed but also throughout the nation's history.

Proverbs 31.17 and Miriam's Spirituality in Midrash Mishle

Another section in *Midrash Mishle* which portrays a woman as possessing elevated spiritual qualities is the interpretation of Prov. 31.17—'She is a hard worker, strong and industrious'—as dealing with Miriam, Moses' sister (par. 16). In the midrash, Miriam told her father that her mother was destined to bear a son who would save Israel. When Moses was born and they could keep him at home no longer (Exod. 2.2-3a), her father said to her: 'Miriam, what of your prophecy?', stood up and spat in her face.[1] Miriam, however, held on to her prophecy. An extensive homily on Miriam's prophetic abilities and courage is recorded already in the Tanaitic *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*.[2]

> 'And Miriam the prophetess took a timbrel in her hand' (Exod. 15.20). But where do we find that Miriam prophesied? It is merely this. Miriam has said to her father, You are destined to beget a son who will rise and save Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. Immediately, 'There went a man of the house of Levi, and took a wife...and the woman conceived and bore a son...and when she could no longer hide him...' (Exod. 2.1-3). Then her father reproached her. He said to her, Miriam, what of your prediction? But she still held on to her prophecy, as it is said: 'And his sister stood afar to know what would be done to him' (2.4). The expression 'stood' suggests the presence of the Holy Spirit, as in the passage 'I saw the Lord standing beside the altar' (Amos 9.1)... 'And the Lord came and stood' (1 Sam. 3.10)... 'Call Joshua and stand' (Deut. 31.14) etc.
>
> 'A timbrel in her hand'. But where could the Israelites have gotten timbrels and flutes in the wilderness? It was simply that the righteous ones had been confident and knew that God would perform miracles and mighty deeds for them at their going out from Egypt, and they prepared for themselves timbrels and flutes.

A similar homily is found also in *b. Meg.* 14a. It is reported in the name of Rab, a Babylonian Amora of the first generation.[3]

1. See Num. 12.14.
2. *Deshira Beshalah* 10.
3. The same phrase is discussed by other sages in *b. Soṭ* 12b-13a and in *Exod. R.* 1.25. In *Soṭ* 11b Miriam is identified with the midwife Pu'ah (Exod. 1.15-20).

> Miriam [was a prophetess], as it is written, 'And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron' (Exod. 15.20). Was she only the sister of Aaron and not the sister of Moses? R. Nahman said in the name of Rab, [She was so called] because she prophesied when she was the sister of Aaron [only], and said: My mother is destined to bear a son who will save Israel. When he was born the whole house was filled with light, and her father arose and kissed her on the head, saying: My daughter, thy prophecy has been fulfilled. But when they threw him into the river, her father arose and tapped her on the head, saying: Daughter, where is your prophecy? So it is written, 'And his sister stood afar off in order to know' (Exod. 2.4) [that is], what would be with the latter part of her prophecy.

According to the Bible Sarah and Miriam are two active women who exercise influence in history. Both act through the female/feminine mode of raising male heroes and educating them. But while Sarah tries to do it in the most direct way of motherhood and her story is the classical story of an infertile woman,[1] Miriam initiates a very sophisticated chain of events in order that her brother be royally raised and yet remain in touch with his family and source community.[2] Both figures have prophetic ability, and are capable of taking measures in order to fulfil their prophecies. Sarah, however, acts inside her home and her affinity with God is expressed only in God's words to Abraham, 'In all that Sarah says unto you, listen to her voice' (Gen. 21.12); whereas Miriam acts, from the very beginning, outside her home. Later, in the desert, she even equates her own position with Moses' position (Num. 12). Ultimately she too has a direct bond with God, even though its content is scolding and the promise of punishment. It is reported that Miriam also has great influence on the people of Israel, for she can make the people grumble or rejoice at will (Exod. 15, Num. 12). The sages expanded the spiritual qualities of these two women, each according to her own mode of action. In Sarah they emphasized her connection with and relatedness to God, and in Miriam they emphasized her vigor and courage. The representation of these women as models of *ēšet ḥayil*, 'virtuous woman', illustrates that

1. Cf. Genesis 16 and 21.
2. Exodus 2.

there were sages who possessed liberal concepts of woman and womanhood, even though theirs might have been minority opinions.

Other Biblical Women Mentioned in Midrash Eshet Hayil

The midrashic texts discussed so far deal with women of fine spiritual qualities. Other texts, especially within the *Midrash Eshet Hayil*, refer to women who demonstrate other stereotypic male/masculine virtues—such as Jael (Judg. 4–5), to whom the midrash attributes wide knowledge in the Torah; Rahav, to whom the midrash attributes special bravery (Josh. 2); and Michal, who is both brave and clever enough to save David from death (1 Sam. 19). I did not find ancient sources for those later midrashic texts. Therefore, I cannot link the opinions expressed in them to any earlier sages.

ēšet ḥayil and Political Performance

I will now discuss one more segment of the midrash whereby *ēšet ḥayil* is presented as a woman involved in the political world, usually and commonly viewed as a male world. This midrash explicates Prov. 31.26, 'She speaks with gentle wisdom', as an allusion to the 'wise woman' of Abel Beth Maacha, who saves her town from being destroyed by Joab and his soldiers (2 Sam. 20). The midrash identifies that wise woman with Serah daughter of Asher.[1]

> 'She speaks with a gentle wisdom.' This is the wise woman who said, 'Hear, hear! Say I entreat you to Joab, come near here, that I may speak with you' (2 Sam. 20.16). She saved the town by her wisdom, and she was Serah daughter of Asher.

The source for this midrash is found in *Gen. R.* 94.9. The midrash here tries to account for the number of Jacob's sons who came with him to Egypt. The biblical text reports seventy sons (Gen. 40.28). The midrash comments:

> Some say that the number seventy was completed by Serah daughter of Asher. That is in line with this verse, 'Then cried a

1. Cf. Num. 26.46.

wise woman out of the city "Hear, hear! Say, I entreat you, to Joab, come near here so that I may speak with you". And he came near to her and the woman said: "Are you Joab?"' (2 Sam. 20.16-17). She said, You are Joab, that is to say, you are the father of Israel. But in fact you are nothing but Israel's destroyer, so you do not accord with your name. Are you and David masters of Torah? 'And so they ended' (2 Sam. 20.18), meaning, up to now words of Torah came to an end. Is it not written in the Torah, 'When you draw near a city to fight against it then proclaim peace to it' (Deut. 20.10)? And he [Joab] said to her, Who are you? She [the wise woman] said to him, 'I am of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel' (20.19). I am the one who completed the number of Israel in Egypt [so that they reached the number of seventy]. I am the one who delivered the faithful one to the faithful one, namely Joseph to Moses. [Joab said,] What do you want? [The woman said to Joab], 'Do you seek to destroy a city?' (20.19). Forthwith 'Joab answered and said to her, "Far be it from me, far be it from me"'[1] (20.20). He said 'far be it from me' twice... Far be it from David and Far be it from Joab. Far be it from the kingdom of the house of David...

'And the woman said to Joab, "Behold, his head shall be thrown to you"' (20.21). How did she know? She said, Whoever raises an impudent face against the kingdom of the house of David will have his head removed by royal decree. Forthwith, 'Then the woman went to all the people in her wisdom' (20.22). She said to them, Do you not know what David has done? What people has stood against him? What kingdom has stood against him? They said to her, And what does he want? She said to them, A thousand men; would it not be better to give a thousand men than to destroy your town? They said to her, Each one will give what he has to give. She said to them, Perhaps I shall succeed in appeasing him, and he will let a few go. She pretended to go and appease him and returned with a figure of not a thousand but of five hundred, then a hundred, then ten, and then one—and he is a sojourner! And who is he? He is Sheba son of Bichri... She said to them, Since he is going to be put to death and you are going to be put to death, hand him over to them and let not all of you be put to death.
R. Shimeon says, This is what she said to them: Whoever rebels against the kingdom of the house of David is liable to the death penalty.

1. Hebrew: חלילה חלילה.

The identification of the wise woman with Serah daughter of Asher is irrelevant to the present study. However, the behaviour attributed by the midrash to the woman from Abel is relevant. It is worth noting that there are large gaps in the biblical story of 2 Sam. 20.16-22. Among other things, there is no explanation for the reported fact that a woman conducts negotiations with a hostile military leader, nor for the expression 'wise woman'. The reader of the story cannot know whether the 'wise woman' was an ordinary woman known as a very clever individual, or a female political leader. The Bible reveals very little about the process of negotiation. We only have the wise woman's request from Joab not to destroy a great city, and her description of herself as peace-loving and faithful (20.19). The midrash fills in the gaps in the biblical story—by identifying and naming the anonymous 'wise woman', by explaining her description of herself, and by protracting her negotiations with Joab. In the Bible the wise woman's words can be understood as a plea or perhaps a warning. The midrash understands her words as scolding, a teaching of a lesson in the rules of the Torah. According to the midrashic interpretation the 'wise woman' is a brave, forceful and authoritative female figure. The man Joab is presented as a crass, ignorant warrior while the woman is presented as astonishingly intelligent, wise and brave.

A question which remains unresolved in the biblical story is how the 'wise woman' convinces the people of her city to kill Sheba. The midrashic explanation adds some more virtues to the wise woman's portrait. In the midrash, the woman's negotiation with her town's people is a masterpiece of diplomacy. In the midrash the woman conducts two lines of negotiation simultaneously: one with Joab and another with her fellow citizens. By drawing out the two separate lines, the midrash emphasizes the woman's wisdom and shows her ability to adapt the claim to the audience.

Concluding Remarks

The attribution of such wisdom, in addition to other virtues such as bravery and intelligence, to an *ēšet ḥayil*, i.e., the ideal woman, highlights the actuality of a liberal conception of

woman and womanhood among the sages. Two major models, or concepts, of the ideal woman have been revealed by our reading of the midrashic texts on the biblical *ēšet ḥayil* passage. The first concept is that of the ideal woman as a spiritual leader who is close to God and carries out his will; the second describes her as a political leader and diplomat. Both concepts place the ideal woman far beyond the narrow circle of her home and family. Both praise her activities within the wider circles of society, community and nation. Both expand the image of *ēšet ḥayil* obtainable in the biblical passage.

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Part II
WISDOM AND OTHERNESS: THE CASE OF THE ʾIŠŠÂ ZĀRÂ

WHO WOULD BLAME HER? THE 'STRANGE' WOMAN OF PROVERBS 7*

Mieke Heijerman

I would like you to meet the 'strange' woman of Proverbs 7. Is she really as strange as she is presented to be? Before I go further into the matter, I shall refresh your memories and recount briefly what is reported in Proverbs 7. In Proverbs 7 there is a speaker who instructs his or her son (vv. 1-2): it is not clear whether the speaker is a man or a woman. This speaker repeats again and again that her or his words are very important for the son: his life is at stake. If the son does not listen to these words but, instead, follows the smooth words of the 'strange' woman, he will surely die. The speaker's self-declaredly important words form a little exemplary story. This story, which I shall paraphrase in my own words, unfolds as follows.

Although it is dark, the speaker looks down through a window and sees a man without a heart walking in the street. This man runs across a woman who is dressed, we are told, like a harlot, a whore. According to the speaker she is restless and rebellious, unable to stay in her home. This 'strange' and unknown woman seizes the man and kisses him (vv. 6-13). Then she says—her words are reported by our textual speaker, of course:

> Sacrifices are with me, and today I pay my vows;
> so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly,
> and I have found you.
> I have decked my couch with coverings,
> coloured spreads of Egyptian linen;
> I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.
> Come, let us take our fill of love till morning;

* A lecture delivered in Utrecht, February 4, 1993.

let us delight ourselves with love.
For the man is not at home;
he has gone on a long journey; he took the bag of money with him;
at the full moon he will come home (Prov. 7.14-20; RSV, modified by me).

Then the speaker goes on to say that the man listens to the 'strange' woman, which will cost him his life. And the speaker repeats that the sons (now in the plural) have to listen to her or his words because otherwise the 'strange' woman will lead them into the chambers of death.

1. *Questions and Responses to the Text*

When I first read this chapter of Proverbs, my primary response was one of defense. I thought, well, here we encounter yet another biblical male speaker who attacks a woman. Therefore, the questions I wanted to investigate were: Who is this 'strange' woman? What does the text mean when, in v. 5, it labels the woman זרה ('strange') and נכריה ('unknown', or 'foreign')? Is she actually capable of killing young men? And last but not least, is it possible for women to cope with such a text where at least traces of misogyny are evident?

In order to answer these questions, I first had to sort out the socio-cultural context of Proverbs. I came to realize that the textual material in Proverbs reflects several different contexts; therefore, the texts must be interpreted differently for each underlying context. Chronological contexts point to textual origins stemming from different periods. Possible social contexts are the tribe (in which case quite old material is preserved); the family; the school; the corporation or professional guild. And the literary context of Proverbs as a whole and of the Hebrew Bible must be considered too. All these contexts are far from well established in scholarly Bible discourse.

The uncertainty about the socio-cultural context(s) of Proverbs 7 is not necessarily a handicap. It grants me ample room for interpretation. For instance, the textual speaker's identity is not a given factor. That speaker could be a father, a mother, a teacher, a religious person, and so on. I am therefore

able, gratefully albeit carefully, to make use of this interpretive room for manoeuvre. What if the speaker is a man, and what kind of man could he be? Or: why should a woman, a mother, warn her sons in this hostile manner? Before I could work out these thoughts, I had to take several other steps towards a more direct confrontation with the 'strange' woman.

Having concentrated on the context(s), my second step was to focus on the text by means of a detailed exegesis of Proverbs 7. The exegesis produced a lot of detailed information, far too much to reproduce here. But some of the information is striking; and I would like to share it with you.

It turns out that the 'strange' woman is a very active woman, contrary to almost all the men in Proverbs 7 except the speaker (if indeed the speaker is a man). The sons to whom the speaker delivers the warnings, the young man who meets the 'strange' woman and the dead men 'penetrated' by the 'strange' woman, are all passive.

On the other hand, the woman herself gets what she wants: the boys and, probably, their money too. The speaker feels powerless, otherwise why should the speaker repeatedly ask the son to listen? A powerful person would just need to say the word and, consequently, achieve obedience.

This conclusion really made me feel good and proud of this 'strange' woman. I suppose that this is one of the reasons why the speaker only speaks to sons and not to daughters. The speaker paints a picture of the 'strange' woman that is much too attractive. Is this perhaps why she is called זרה, because normal women are not supposed to behave in such an independent manner?

Anyway, the fact remains that the woman is accused of leading young men unto death. So if I want to be a good advocate, I have to bring into the reading more than my pride about her independence.

I therefore concentrated on the verses in which the 'strange' woman has the position of an object or a subject. Among other things, it appears that she does give some information concerning her circumstances, a kind of reason why she wants the young man without a heart in her bed. In the beginning and at the end of her reported speech (vv. 14-20) she, directly or indirectly,

mentions the subject of money (in v. 14 and in v. 20). Is she perhaps in need of money? In the following interpretation you will find that the consequences of her alleged need for money are taken seriously. In the meantime we must keep in mind that the 'strange' woman's words reach us through the mouth of the speaker. Hence, we are never sure whether the speaker is quoting her correctly or not. But, as we shall soon see, there may be a solution for this problem.

After this second step—my own exegesis, some more traces of which you will find in the final stage of interpretation—I turned to some biblical scholars. Unfortunately, I must admit that many male commentators, just like the speaker-in-the-text of Proverbs 7, do not in fact listen to the 'strange' woman's words. From the outset, they accept that the speaker-in-the-text is right. This is contrary to the position upheld by most of the female scholars who behave, and they are conscious of behaving, as advocates of sorts for the 'strange' woman. And this interpretive gender split corresponds to my reading intentions.

When I started my investigation, the question was: who is the 'strange' woman? By now I have exegeted the text. I have already read the interpretations of others (especially Brenner,[1] Camp,[2] van Dijk-Hemmes,[3] Newsom[4] and Yee[5]). I am therefore fairly confident that it is possible to paint several alternative portraits of this 'strange' woman of Proverbs 7. And it is not just

1. A. Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

2. C.V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985); 'Woman Wisdom as a Root Metaphor: A Theological Consideration', in K.G. Hoglund *et al.* (eds.), *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honour of Roland E. Murphy* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), pp. 45-76; 'Wise and Strange: An Interpretation of the Female Imagery in Proverbs in Light of Trickster Mythology', *Semeia* 42 (1988), pp. 14-36, reprinted in this volume.

3. In Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*.

4. C.A. Newsom, 'Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9', in P.L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 142-60.

5. G.A. Yee, '"I Have Perfumed My Bed with Myrrh": The Foreign Woman (*ʾiššа zārâ*) in Proverbs 1–9', *JSOT* 43 (1989), pp. 53-68, reprinted in this volume.

'possible'; it would constitute an injustice to her and to the textual speaker if I drew only one single picture of this woman. I want to treat both the textual speaker *and* the 'strange' woman seriously. The issue of contexts, which was referred to earlier, is involved here as well. And something strange happens at this stage. I hope you enjoy yourselves because you are going to meet three 'strange' women instead of just one such woman. Do not be alarmed: I am sure that they will not lead you unto death.

2. *The First Portrait: A Mother's Rival*

I shall name the first woman 'a mother's rival'. In this reading option, Proverbs 7 is read as an admonition from the viewpoint of a mother, or all mothers in Israel who warn their sons about seductive women. 'Listen to me, son! Do not listen to this dangerous woman in the street.' In her turn the 'strange' woman, in her seductive (reported) speech, does not mention a mother as a possible rival. No, she only mentions 'the man' to whom she seems to belong anyhow (vv. 19-20). According to her, when he is not at home everything is possible. She does not reckon with jealous mothers or other jealous women. It is rewarding to see that the mother inverts the patriarchal order, inverts the status quo, while she is intent on speaking on behalf of this same order. She wants her son to behave sensibly, neatly, and to behave like a man with a heart who knows what he wants. But in her speech no such men with a heart are present. As we have seen, all the men are passive and impotent, while the 'strange' woman but also the speaking mother herself are active and potent. This is, then, contrary to reality. We can speak of a 'double voice' here—a concept well known to those who have read Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes's dissertation.[1] Good listeners and, I think, particularly female listeners get a double message. 'Strange' women are wicked because they are deadly for men. However, being a 'strange' woman is exciting: you can go out and do what you want while disregarding restrictive conventions. But the dominant wish of the mother is that her

1. F. van Dijk-Hemmes, 'Sporen van vrouwenteksten in de Hebreeuwse Bijbel' (PhD dissertation, Utrecht University, 1992).

son maintains an intimate relationship with Lady Wisdom and insight. The son has to call wisdom and insight respectively his sister and his relative (v. 4). In other words, the mother wants her son to maintain a non-sexual but close relationship with herself.

Well, taking all this into account, who is the 'strange' woman? From the mother's point of view, she is the woman from outside the family, especially from outside the close mother–son relationship. She is neither selected nor bought by the family of mother and son, for the son. On the contrary: she offers herself, she takes the initiative. By so behaving, she places herself on the margin of society and, therefore, can be easily identified with chaos. Chaos and death are almost synonymous, so it is not surprising that the mother thinks the 'strange' woman leads unto death.

As mentioned before, the words זרה ('strange') and נכריה ('unknown', 'foreign'; v. 5) have to be explained according to their particular context; they may mean 'strange' but also 'different', 'unknown', 'foreign', 'Other', and even any combination of these meanings. In this context זרה might mean the woman who is a typical non-mother, who operates outside the family structures on which society is based. Therefore she is 'strange', unknown insofar as the mother is concerned.

It may be that the mother calls the woman 'strange' for another reason too. In order to warn her son effectively, the mother has to partly identify herself with the 'strange' woman, by delivering the latter's strange words through her own mouth. It is as if the mother herself plays the harlot she describes for a moment. Perhaps she finds the courage to do so only by fabricating as vast a distance as possible between the 'strange' woman and herself. She places herself upstairs behind a window, while the woman is downstairs in the street; moreover, the mother calls the woman 'strange', 'unknown'. In that case 'strange' here also denotes what it often does: she is not like me, and I am the norm.

The first portrait of the 'strange' woman, then, shows a woman who, in the mother's opinion, has not adapted herself to a society that (as we know) is a patriarchal society. She is a threat to the future of the son and, therefore, also to the future

and happiness of the mother. Whether the 'strange' woman actually adapts herself to society or does not adjust will become apparent in her third portrait.

3. *Second Portrait: A Men's Scapegoat*

But now let us turn to the second portrait, which I label 'a men's scapegoat'. My point of departure for this portrait is the book of Proverbs as a whole. Now the speaker-in-the-text is the final editor of Proverbs, probably a man who must have totally internalized the mother's words. This speaker too lives in a society for which family structures are essential (according to Claudia Camp, the early post-exilic period is the plausible chronological background[1]). The speaker is affected by the well-known whore–madonna complex. He thinks that there are only two sorts of women, whores and madonnas. Clearly, the deviant behaviour of the 'strange' woman makes him decide that she belongs to the whores. Her behaviour damages early post-exilic Israelite society, which requires solid families in order to preserve land and capital and, of course, obtain offspring. He recommends that distance be maintained from the 'strange' woman because of her attractiveness. The speaker calls her 'strange' and 'unknown' precisely because he wishes her to remain so. It is as if he proclaims: I have never met such a woman; I have never been a man without a heart, unlike the man in my story, who let himself be seduced. So, the speaker presents himself as a shining example. Another reason for his calling the woman 'strange' is because she neither possesses nor explores the female skills and attributes which he, also the final editor of the Woman of Worth poem in Proverbs 31, respects. Thus, while the speaker does not want to be acquainted with the 'strange' woman, he, at the same time, strongly fulminates against her words. This is suspicious. Hence, can we learn something about the 'strange' woman from her own words? Can we somehow meet her as she 'really' is? What kind of a portrait materializes when we listen seriously to her own words instead of to the probably misleading words of the speaker?

1. *Wisdom and the Feminine.*

4. *Third Portrait: A Needy Woman*

I have tried to listen carefully to the 'strange' woman's words, and the picture to emerge constitutes a third portrait. I call it 'a needy woman'. The 'strange' woman (and by the way, she does not call herself 'strange') must be a woman with problems, although I am not sure what exactly her problems are. She hopes that her religious vows can help her (v. 14), but she needs money in order to fulfil them. She does not possess that money. 'That man' (הָאִישׁ, v. 19) may be rich, but he controls the money and has taken the money bag with him (v. 20). Many women who have lived before and after her have embraced the same solution: occasional prostitution. Selling one's body might not have been all that strange for ancient Israelite women. They must have become used to regarding themselves and their bodies as chattel; after all, when they were still little girls, their families would already have sold them to the families of their future husbands. We should not view the 'strange' woman's problem, for which she made a religious vow, lightly. Prostitution, when it entailed adultery as well, was a grave sin which carried the death penalty. Karel van der Toorn[1] shows that childlessness was one of the causes of women's taking such vows. Childlessness was often a reason for men to send their wives away, so that childless women did not have much to lose. If experience teaches that religious vows lead to children, or that the ensuing adultery does (because husbands can also be infertile), the choice is quickly made. From this perspective, then, the 'strange' woman is not a woman who does not adapt herself to society. On the contrary, she is perforce flexible, and lives in the religious hope that her life will undergo a favourable shift. She does everything in her power to achieve this shift. Who would blame her for that?

5. *The Significance of a Text like Proverbs 7*

Now that we have come into contact with the 'strange' woman, there is still an important issue to discuss, namely: what is the

1. K. van der Toorn, 'Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel', *JBL* 108.2 (1989), pp. 193-205.

worth of this text, which is, at the very least, a partly misogynistic text for women readers? How can we cope with it? I would like to set out several alternatives.

First, if you, as a woman, still get depressed by ch. 7 of Proverbs, I would say: do not worry, because the text is not meant for you. The speaker addresses a son and sons. Therefore, daughters, plug your ears. You are neither supposed nor obliged to listen to these words. It is helpful to keep this in mind.

Nevertheless, when sons are taught 'wisdom' about women, it is important for women's self-interest that they be well informed about the contents of these lessons. We have just heard what the messages of Proverbs 7 are. Thus secondly, women can respond by gathering women's wisdom for the sake of other women, for the sake of daughters who should be told about men and how some of them can lead you into the chambers of death. Women can also teach their sons that prostitutes are women who deserve our respect. This not only serves prostitutes and women in general, but is also pedagogically clever. Every parent knows that things that are forbidden are particularly attractive for children.

Thirdly, Proverbs 7 can be read as a beautiful example of transference and projection. Matters of which the speaker is afraid can be displaced by transference outside himself—or herself—and projected onto the 'strange' woman. The mother might be afraid of her own wish to be as independent and powerful as the 'strange' woman, while the male speaker might deny his sexual desires by attacking women who are like the 'strange' woman. For instance, we all know about the Northern American preachers who strongly attacked extra-marital sex while in fact practising it themselves.

Last but not least, the 'strange' woman teaches us that chaos and creativity are closely linked to one another. Because she is socially marginal, the 'strange' woman is not as safeguarded as she might be within her marriage. By relinquishing the protective shelter of marriage, although for a limited period only, she can afford to do and say things that are normally unacceptable for respectable women. Suddenly she can go wherever she pleases and speak and behave the way she wants. Instead of being dead she writes, by her deviant behaviour, her own biography. The

speaker in Proverbs 7 and the many disapproving interpreters must have been unaware that on this point they have in fact cooperated with her.

Postscript

When I read this paper, some members of the audience raised issues to which I wish to respond.

Bob Becking asked whether a fourth portrait of the 'strange' woman can be drawn, a portrait of a foreign goddess (for example, Egyptian or Ugaritic). I have just painted three portraits. I have not considered whether the 'strange' woman's figure originates in a foreign religion because I did not feel that the 'strange' woman functions as a goddess in the text. But a reader who is interested in such matters will undoubtedly find such cognates. Furthermore, I think that goddesses (and gods) are a sort of projection too, since they are also Other (as women are for men?). I merely wanted to point out that the 'strange' woman in Proverbs 7 is a projection: made by women (the first portrait), by men (the second portrait) and perhaps also by me (the third and last portrait). In that sense, I have perhaps presented two or three (foreign) goddesses!

Athalya Brenner asked whether I could commit myself to one favourite portrait, and whether there was a portrait on which I worked with the greatest pleasure. To which I answer: yes, the second one, because it is also a portrait of men. I like to describe men as I did in the second portrait. This is how I can get rid (partly, I must say) of my aggression toward men. In fact it agrees with the way the textual mother in the first portrait makes men look powerless and impotent. Hence, I like the first portrait too.

It is a pity, but I do not like the 'strange' woman herself as much it might appear, to judge from the third portrait. In fact she is too religious for me, too positive, and not 'strange' enough. It is a too harmonious picture of a woman who is doing the best she can. Maybe she is too much like parts of me. I tend to like people who behave more strangely and more freely.

'I HAVE PERFUMED MY BED WITH MYRRH': THE FOREIGN WOMAN (ʾIŠŠÂ ZĀRÂ) IN PROVERBS 1–9*

Gale A. Yee

The powerful but insidious symbol of a woman seducing a man sexually to sin, resulting in any number of dire consequences, is one that has been ingrained in the literature of Western civilization ever since Eve gave the fateful fruit to Adam in the garden. One finds in particular that authors, ancient and modern, localize the source of seduction in the voice of woman. Her bewitching words send the innocent man to his doom. Such was the fate of those who hearkened to the voices of the Sirens and the Lorelei.

In Proverbs 1–9 this woman takes the form of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* the ultimate antithesis of Lady Wisdom. Studies on the *ʾiššâ zārâ* have primarily focused on the identity of the 'foreign woman'—for example, whether she is literally an ethnic 'foreign' woman or simply 'foreign' in behavior, a fertility cult devotee, or just an ordinary adultress.[1]

In this paper, however, I am more concerned with exactly *how* the seductive words of the 'foreign woman' function in the Proverbs texts themselves. In what precise ways do the speeches

* This article first appeared in *JSOT* 43 (1989), pp. 53-68.

1. Cf. G. Boström, *Proverbiastudien: Die Weisheit und das fremde Weib* (Lund: Gleerup, 1935); P. Humbert, 'La femme étrangère du livre des Proverbes', *Revue des Etudes Sémitiques* 6 (1937), pp. 40-64; *idem*, 'Les adjectifs "*zâr*" et "*nokrî*" et la femme étrangère', in *Mélanges Syriens offerts à M. René Dussaud*, I (Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique, 30; Paris: Librarie Orientalisk Paul Geuthner, 1939), pp. 259-66; L.A. Snijders, 'The Meaning of *zar* in the Old Testament', *OTS* 10 (1954), pp. 103-104; *idem*, '*zûr/zâr*', *TDOT*, IV, pp. 56-57; C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), pp. 115-20.

of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* enthrall and entrap? In what particularly literary and theological ways does she represent an antithesis to Lady Wisdom? I will show how the author of Proverbs 1–9 arranges the speeches of Lady Wisdom and of the 'foreign woman' in a particular macrostructure in which he highlights the virtues and attractions of the former, while exposing the terrible risks of the latter. The author characterizes the two women as competitors for the same man, the son instructed by his father. Both women are described in dangerously similar terms; both speak perilously similar messages to beckon the young man to their respective houses. However, as we will see, the speeches of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* destructively lead to death, as Wisdom's call leads to life.

1. *The ʾiššâ zārâ and Other Shady Ladies in Proverbs 1–9*

One finds that the *ʾiššâ zārâ*, or simply *zārâ*, parallels *nokrîyâ*, literally 'alien woman', in 2.16, 5.20 and 7.5. *zārâ* is used alone with no parallel in 5.3. *nokrîyâ* parallels *ʾēšetrâᶜ*, evil woman, in 6.24 and *zônâ*, harlot, in 23.27. Furthermore, in 6.26 an *ʾiššâ zônâ*, harlot, is contrasted with an *ʾēšet ʾîš*, a married woman who in this context is unfaithful. Finally, 9.13 depicts an *ʾēšet kᵉsîlût*, a foolish woman, who tries to lure the simple and those without sense away from Wisdom's banquet to her own lascivious one. The question one must ask is whether or not the different descriptions, *nokrîyâ*, *ʾiššâ zônâ*, *ʾēšet ʾîš* and *ʾēšet kᵉsîlût* all refer to one figure: the *ʾiššâ zārâ*. Opinions have been divided over this question.[1]

For several reasons, I prefer to think of one woman, the *ʾiššâ zārâ* who is described variously, rather than presuming different women. In the first place, I will demonstrate below that these different women share a cluster of descriptions that would warrant positing one woman. Secondly, associated with Wisdom

1. See Boström, *Proverbiastudien*, pp. 143-45, 156-57; R.N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1965), p. 49; Snijders, 'The Meaning of *zar*', pp. 94-95; W. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 328-29, 365-67; O. Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos* (BKAT, 17; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), p. 106.

herself are various attributes which seem to take on their own personified character. I note, for example, Prov. 2.10-12:

> For Wisdom will come into your heart
> And Knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
> Discretion will watch over you;
> Understanding will guard you,
> Delivering you from the way of evil,
> From men of perverted speech (RSV; cf. 4.5-9, 13; 8.1).

In this case, one would not think of different personifications, Knowledge, Discretion and Understanding, besides Wisdom. Rather, these attributes form a poetic cluster that points to one figure, namely Wisdom. Similarly, the alien, harlotrous, evil, adulterous and foolish woman all refer to one figure embodied in the *'iššâ zārâ* who stands over and against Wisdom.[1] Thirdly, the macrostructure of Proverbs 1–9 would support a unity of attributes focused on the *'iššâ zārâ*. It is this discussion of the Proverbs 1–9 macrostructure that I now take up.

2. *The Speech Structure of Proverbs 1–9*

In a very perceptive article J.N. Aletti argues that what seduces the young man without sense are the *speeches* of *'iššâ zārâ* above anything else.[2] From the mouth of Lady Wisdom and the mouth of the foreign woman come similar but competing claims.[3] Two female personifications propose the same thing to the simple and inexperienced, but one wishes their good, the other evil. I will discuss these parallel claims in greater detail shortly. Building upon Aletti's insight into the speeches of the foreign woman and Lady Wisdom, I will outline the structure of these speeches in Proverbs 1-9 and the relationship of our *'iššâ zārâ* texts within this structure.

Assuming that the present overall framework of Proverbs 1–9

1. Thus also is the conclusion of Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 115-17.

2. J.-N. Aletti, 'Séduction et parole en Proverbs I-IX', *VT* 27 (1977), pp. 129-44.

3. The one exception where the foreign woman seduces with her beauty is Prov. 6.25. In all other cases, she persuades primarily with her tempting words.

is instruction that a father gives to his son about how to come to know Wisdom,[1] definite speeches within this instructional framework are delivered by various personages as part of the heuristic method of the father. These speeches assume a particular structure into which the father's warnings against the *ʾiššâ zārâ* are placed. This structure is as follows:

	Prov. 1.11-14	Speech of the Sinners	A
	Prov. 1.22-33	Speech of Wisdom	B
	*Warning against the *ʾiššâ zārâ* —2.16-19*		
I	Prov. 4.4-9	Speech of the Father's Father	B′
	*Warning against the *zārâ* —5.1-11, 15-23*		
	Prov. 5.12-14	Speech of the Son	A′
	*Warning against the *ʾēšet rāʿ*—6.23-35*		
	Prov. 7.14-20	Speech of the *ʾiššâ zārâ*	A
	Prov. 8.4-36	Speech of Wisdom	B
II	Prov. 9.5-6	Speech of Wisdom	B′
	Prov. 9.16-17	Speech of the *ʾēšet kᵉsîlût*	A′

Some preliminary remarks are necessary. These are speeches set within the overall instruction of the father in Proverbs 1–9. They divide themselves into two main groups that form two chiastic patterns. In both groupings, the speeches of Wisdom and her spokesperson (viz. the father's own father in 4.4-9) are far longer than those of the sinners, the misled son and the *ʾiššâ zārâ*. Thus, even in literary quantity the speeches of Wisdom and her agent outweigh the rival group, thus highlighting the veracity of their claims. Furthermore, the chiastic structure focuses on the speeches of Wisdom and her agent in each of the two groups (B/B′). In the first grouping, references of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* appear as warnings of the father against her. In the second group, she actually utters her fatal speeches to the young man without sense. Let us now turn to each of these speeches in greater detail, focusing especially on the *ʾiššâ zārâ* texts.

1. Without necessarily accepting the conclusions regarding original vs. secondary texts, or causal relationship with other ancient Near Eastern instruction texts, see McKane, *Proverbs*, pp. 7-10. Also consult Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 179-208, who argues that Prov. 1–9, 31 forms a literary re-contextualization of Prov. 10–30, particularly in its feminine Wisdom imagery.

a. *Proverbs 1.11-14—Speech of Sinners*

One encounters the first speech, that of the sinners, in 1.11-14:

> 'Come (*lᵉkâ*) with us,
> let us *lie in wait* (*neʾerbâ*) for blood,
> let us wantonly ambush the innocent:
> like *Sheol* let us swallow them alive
> and whole, like those who go down to the *Pit*,
> we shall find all precious goods,
> we shall fill our houses with spoil;
> throw in your lot with us,
> we will all have one purse' (1.11-14, RSV)

Points of contact between the speech of the sinners here in 1.11-12 and the speech of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* in Proverbs 7 are striking. First, the summons of the sinners to 'Come (*lᵉkâ*)' in 1.11 is the same in the address of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* who seductively bids the young man, 'Come (*lᵉkâ*)! Let us take our fill of love till morning' (7.18). Moreover, just as the sinners lie in wait (*neʾerbâ*) for blood, so too does the *ʾiššâ zārâ* lie in wait (*teʾĕrōb*) for the man without sense in 7.12. Finally, like the sinners who swallow their prey like Sheol and the Pit, the house of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* is 'the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death' (7.27).[1]

In the context of the father's exhortation to his son, we see here in Prov. 1.11-14 that the sinners and the *ʾiššâ zārâ* are identified. Clearly, the lines are being drawn where the *ʾiššâ zārâ* will personify all that is evil and destructive in society and Wisdom will personify everything that is good, lifegiving and of God's very self.

b. *Proverbs 2.16-19—The First Warning 1.24-28 against the ʾiššâ zārâ*

In the context of Lady Wisdom's first speech (1.20-33) and the father's instruction regarding Wisdom which follows it (2.1-15), the first warning against the *ʾiššâ zārâ* appears in 2.16-19. Wisdom has just announced in 1.24-28 that she will forsake the fools and the simple-minded because they have refused to listen to her. The father then exhorts the son that if *he* is attentive to Wisdom, he will not suffer the same fate. Indeed, Wisdom will shield and protect the son, even as she abandons those who

1. Cf. also Prov. 2.18; 5.5; 9.18.

reject her (2.1-11). From whom does Wisdom protect the son? The father's exhortation contains an explicit literary identification of those who are evil with our *ʾiššâ zārâ*:

2.10	(For (*kî*) Wisdom will come (*tābôʾ*) into your heart...)	
2.12	to deliver you (*lᵉhaṣṣîlᵉkā*) from the way of evil	A
	from men of perverted speech (*mᵉdabbēr tahpūkôt*),	B
2.13	who forsake (*haʿōzʿbîm*) the path of uprightness	C
	to walk in the way of darkness,	
2.14	who rejoice in doing evil	
	and delight in the perverseness of evil,	
2.15	whose paths are crooked (*ʿorḥōtêhem ʿiqqᵉšîm*)	D
	and who are devious in their tracks (*bᵉmaʿgᵉlôtām*),	E
2.16	to deliver you (*lᵉhaṣṣîlᵉkā*) from the (*ʾiššâ zārâ*)	A′
	from the *nokrîyâ* with her smooth words	
	(*ʾᵃmārêhā heḥᵉlîqâ*),	B′
2.17	who forsakes (*haʿōzebet*) the companion of her youth	C′
	and forgets the covenant of her God,	
2.18	For (*kî*) her house sinks down to death;	
	her tracks (*maʿgᵉlōtêhā*) to the Shades.	E′
2.19	None who go to her (*bāʾêhā*) return	
	Nor do they regain the paths of life (*ʿorhôt hayyîm*)	D′
	(Prov. 2.10, 12-19)	

We observe that the verses divide themselves into two groupings, those that deal with evil men (2.12-15) and those that deal with the *ʾiššâ zārâ* (2.16-19). Both groups share words and ideas in common which argue in favor of the identification of the evil men and the *ʾiššâ zārâ*. In the first place, Wisdom will deliver the son (*lᵉ* + *hiph.* inf. *nṣl* + suffix) both from 'the way of evil' (A) and from the *ʾiššâ zārâ* (A′); from 'men of perverted speech' (B) and from the *nokrîyâ* with her smooth words (B′), who forsake (pt. *ʿzb*) the paths of uprightness (C) and the companion of her youth (C′); whose paths are crooked (D) leading away from the paths of life (D′); whose tracks are devious (E), leading to the Shades themselves (E′).

Furthermore, the *kî* clauses in 2.10 and 2.18 firmly contrast Wisdom with the *ʾiššâ zārâ*. Wisdom takes an active role in claiming the attentive son: she will come (*tābô*) into the son's heart to protect him from evil men and the *ʾiššâ zārâ*. However, the house in which the *ʾiššâ zārâ* abides leads to death itself. Those who actively go to her (*bāʾêhā*) will never return.

c. *Proverbs 5.11; 6.24-35—The Second and Third Warnings against the ʾiššâ zārâ*

We now come to the second and third warnings against *ʾiššâ zārâ* in the contexts of the father's speech (4.4-9) and the speech of the deluded son (5.12-14). In 4.4-9 the father shares with his son a speech which his own father, the son's grandfather, had delivered to him.

(When I was a son with my father,
tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,
he taught me, and said to me,)
'Let your heart hold fast my words;
keep my commandments, and live;
do not forget, and do not turn away
from the words of my mouth.
Get wisdom; get insight.
Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;
love her, and she will guard you.
The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,
and whatever you get, get insight.
Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;
she will honor you if you embrace her.
She will place on your head a fair garland;
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown' (4.4-9 RSV).

Emphasized here in the speech is the traditioning process: the father passes on to his son what his own father passed on to him. Thus, the father confirms the authority and truth of his claims by appealing to something very stable and very ancient.[1] Wisdom herself will appeal to antiquity in a corresponding speech later where she asserts that she was with God's very self at the beginning of creation (8.22-31).

Also noteworthy in the grandfather's speech is the bridal imagery used. The son is urged to love Wisdom and not forsake her.[2] Wisdom will bestow a garland and crown upon the son who embraces her in 4.8-9.[3] As the son is urged to embrace (*ḥbq*)

1. Aletti, 'Séduction et Parole', p. 141.
2. Cf. Prov. 2.17 where the foreign woman is accused of forsaking the companion of her youth.
3. On the bridal imagery of these passages, see Boström, *Proverbiastudien*, p. 162; H. Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in*

Wisdom, he will likewise be warned against embracing (*ḥbq*) the bosom of the *nokrîyâ* in 5.20. The grandfather's speech highlights the possessing of Wisdom as a bride and lover, a theme that will figure prominently in the following chapters, particularly with respect to the *ʾiššâ zārâ* and her own speeches. We will see that both Wisdom and the *ʾiššâ zārâ* are described as potential lovers of the son. The danger that the *ʾiššâ zārâ* will represent is that her seductive speech is couched in words similar to those Wisdom herself addresses to the son.

After his own father's speech, the father delivers his familiar caution against the wicked in 4.10-27. It is in this context that the father warns the son against the seductive speeches of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* herself in 5.3-6:

> For the lips of a *zārâ* drip honey (*nōpet tiṭṭōpᶜnâ*),
> and her speech is smoother than oil;
> But in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
> sharp as a two-edged sword.
> Her feet go down to death;
> her steps follow the path to Sheol;
> She does not take heed to the path of life;
> her ways wander and she does not know it (Prov. 5.3-6, RSV).

In the father's warning, the competing speeches of Wisdom and her claims vis-à-vis the *ʾiššâ zārâ* become more explicit, particularly in the bridal imagery used. In Song 4.11 the lover proclaims to his beloved: 'Your lips drip honey (*nōpet tiṭṭōpᶜnâ*), my bride'. Such imagery also describes Wisdom. In Prov. 24.13-14a, the father states:

> 'My son, eat honey (*dᶜbaš*), for it is good,
> and the drippings of the honeycomb (*nōpet mātôq*)
> are sweet to your taste.
> Know that Wisdom is such to your soul' (24.13-14a, RSV).

Furthermore, Wisdom herself asserts in Prov. 8.6-8:

> 'Hear, for I will speak noble things,
> from my *lips* (*miptaḥ śᶜpātay*) will come what is right;

the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East (Lund: Hakan Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1947), p. 106; Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 93-94, 100. But cf. McKane, *Proverbs*, pp. 305-306.

> For my mouth will utter truth;
> Wickedness is an abomination to *my lips* (*śᵉpātay*)' (8.6-7, RSV).

In contrast, however, the seductive lips of the foreign woman also drip honey, but rather than being good for the soul, speaking noble things, they lead to Sheol and death (5.6; cf. 2.18-19).

In the father's exhortation which follows in 5.7-11, it is not entirely clear at this point whether the *ʾiššâ zārâ* is a married woman who is adulterous, or an ordinary or cultic prostitute. Nevertheless, the father enjoins, 'Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house' (5.8). The imaginary speech of a deceived son in Prov. 5.12-14 is the context of the father's third and final warning to his son of the consequences of listening to the seductive words of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* and not heeding his instruction. The deluded son announces:

> 'How I hated disciple,
> and my heart despised reproof!
> I did not listen to the voices of my teachers
> or incline my ear to my instructors.
> I was at the point of utter ruin
> in the assembled congregation' (5.12-14, RSV).

Strengthening the interpretation of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* as an adulterous wife (foreign or otherwise) are the verses which follow this imaginary speech of the son. Prov. 5.15-23 continue the father's warning against the *ʾiššâ zārâ* that began in 5.3. The father exhorts his son in 5.15 to 'Drink water from your own cistern; flowing water from your own wells (*nōzᵉlîm mittôk bᵉʾerkā*)'. Further, in 5.18, he states, 'Let your fountain (*māqôr*) be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely hind, a graceful doe'.[1] The imagery recalls Song 4.15 where the groom describes the bride as an enclosed garden containing 'a garden fountain, a well of living water (*bᵉʾer mayîm hayyîm*), and flowing streams (*nōzᵉlîm*) from Lebanon'. Through erotic images the father urges the son to enjoy his own wife and not be tempted by an adultress. He brings the point home by means of a chiastic wordplay:

1. Cf. Song 2.9, 17; 8.14.

'Let (your wife's) *breasts* fill you at all times	A
In her love be seduced (*tišgeh*) always	B
Why be seduced (*tišgeh*), my son, by a *zarâ*,	B′
and embrace the *bosom* of a *nokrîyâ*?' (5.19-20	A′

The father's third warning against the *ʾiššâ zārâ* in 6.24-35 continues the theme of the perils of the adultress. Again the focus is upon the alluring speeches of the woman: 'to preserve you from the evil woman, (*ʾēšet rāʿ*), from the smooth tongue of the *nokrîyâ*' (6.24). This final warning of the father prepares for the first speech of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* which follows in Proverbs 7. In the first place, unlike an ordinary harlot who is simply bought,[1] an adulterous *ʾēšet ʾîš*, married woman, stalks a man's very life (*nepeš*, 6.26; cf. 5.32). We will see this theme recur in 7.21-23 where the young man, persuaded by the seductive speech of the *ʾiššâ zārâ*, does not realize that it will cost him his life (*nepeš*). Moreover, the father insists that the one who commits adultery has no sense (*ḥ^{a}sar lēb*, 6.32). This is precisely the description of the foreign woman's prey in 7.7, a young man without sense (*ḥ^{a}sar lēb*). In the speeches of Wisdom and of the foolish woman in Proverbs 9, the man without sense is also the focus of the addresses (9.4, 16). Finally, the father insists that the consequences of the affair are wounds, disgrace and the revenge of the husband (6.34-35). And yet the *ʾiššâ zārâ* emphasizes in her speech to the young man the time-honored line that her husband is not home and will not return for weeks (7.19-20).

Before I turn to the second group of speeches in Proverbs 7–9, I would like to summarize my results on the first group which I examined in Proverbs 1–6. The father presents speeches of four different characters as part of his overall instructional technique to his son: the speech of the sinners (A), the speech of Wisdom (B), the speech of the grandfather (B′) and the speech of the misled son (A′). The chiastic ordering highlights in B/B′ those voices to which the son must listen in order to possess life. If the son heeds the words of the sinners (A), he will articulate the

1. Cf. P. Bird, 'Images of Women in the Old Testament', in R.R. Ruether (ed.), *Religion and Sexism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), pp. 66-67; S. Niditch, 'The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Gen. 38', *HTR* 72 (1979), pp. 143-49, regarding the double standard in Israel in dealing with the harlot.

adverse consequences himself, as the father imagines this scenario (A'). In the context of these four speeches the father issues three warnings against the *'iššâ zārâ*. He consistently emphasizes the irresistible seductiveness of her speeches that will lead his son to ruin, portraying her as the metaphorical counterpart to Lady Wisdom. He paints this embodiment of evil as an adulteress, a woman unfaithful to her own marriage vow, trying to disrupt the marriages of other men.

Like the first group, the second group of speeches is arranged chiastically: (A)—the speech of the *'iššâ zārâ* (7.14-20), (B)—the speech of Wisdom (8.1-36), (B')—the speech of Wisdom (9.5-6), and (A')—the speech of the *'ēšet k^{e}sîlût* (9.16-17). Moreover, as in the first groups, the focus of the second group of speeches is upon those of Wisdom (B/B'). My main concern, however, is on the speeches of the *'iššâ zārâ* in A/A'. It is to these speeches that I now turn.

d. *Proverbs 7.14-20—The Speech of the 'iššâ zārâ*

In Proverbs 1–6, the son was warned repeatedly by the father to stay far away from this 'foreign woman' who is intent on his destruction. The first speech of the *'iššâ zārâ* is therefore significant, because she *herself* verbalizes the dangers she presents to the untutored young man.

At the beginning of the chapter, the father contrasts Wisdom and the foreign woman explicitly. As in 4.8-9 and 24.13-14, the father portrays Wisdom in erotic terms as a loved one to be possessed. The father encourages the son in 7.4 to call Wisdom 'sister', a term which Song of Songs uses to describe the bride.[1] Recalling his previous warning in 2.16-19 in his use of *l^{e}* + infinitive,[2] the father exhorts his son to call Wisdom 'sister' and 'intimate friend' in order 'to preserve you (*lišmār^{e}kā*) from the *'iššâ zārâ*, from the *nokrîyâ* with her smooth words' (7.4-5). The father thus introduces the seduction scene where the *'iššâ zārâ* entices the young man with a speech of 'smooth words', words which, as we will see, a genuine lover will utter to her beloved.

Through the window of his house, the father sees a young man among a group of senseless youth heading toward the house of

1. Song 4.9, 10, 12; 5.1, 2; 8.8.
2. See above.

the *ʾiššâ zārâ*(7.6-8).[1] The young man is one without sense (*ḥᵃsarlᵉb*), a description with which the father typified the adulterer just before in 6.32. The father sets the stage for the adulterous encounter at nightfall (7.9). It is a time when normal people usually remain at home, but normal people are not in question in the father's scenario.

In 7.11-12, the father describes the behaviour of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* as loud (*hōmiyyâ*). Her feet do not stay (*škn*) at home. She lies in wait (*ʾrb*) in the streets (*bḥwṣ*) and in the market places (*brḥbwt*). However, these are some of the very words which describe Wisdom. According to 1.20-21, Wisdom is in the streets (*bḥwṣ*) and in the market places (*brḥbwt*) crying out loudly (*hōmiyyôt tiqrāʾ*).[2] Unlike the wayward *ʾiššâ zārâ* whose feet do not stay (*škn*) at home, Wisdom dwells (*škn*) in prudence (8.12). It is the father's technique to depict the foreign woman and Wisdom by the same terminology. In doing so, he emphasizes the twin claims of the two opposing factions. For the father, the greatest seduction to evil consists in inviting the foolish with the same words that summon one to good.[3]

The ambiguity of the tempting words of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* are particularly evident in her speech which climaxes the father's scenario in 7.14-20. She speaks as would a true spouse to her husband. Described in Song 3.1-4, the lover seeks her beloved upon their bed and continues her search through the city streets until she finds him. So too does the *ʾiššâ zārâ* say to the man without sense: 'Now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you' (7.15). The perfumes with which she prepares her bed, the myrrh, aloes and cinnamon (7.16-17), are the same used on the love couches in the Song of Songs.[4] She beckons the young man:

> 'Come, let us take our fill (*rwh*) of love till morning;
> Let us delight ourselves with love (*ʾhb*)' (7.18, RSV).

1. I agree with McKane (*Proverbs*, p. 335), against Boström, that it is the wisdom teacher who looks out from the window, rather than the *ʾiššâ zārâ*.
2. Cf. also 8.1-3.
3. Aletti, 'Séduction et parole', p. 133.
4. Song 3.6; 14.14; 5.1.

We recall that her invitation to 'Come (*lᵉkâ*)!' is the same as the sinners in their speech in 1.11. Furthermore, we saw that the father enjoined his son to let the breasts of his wife fill (*rwh*) him at all times. In her love (*ʾhb*) he should be seduced, and not by that of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* (5.19-20). The call of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* in 7.19-20 is the same, but with a major difference. The love of the true wife will fill her beloved at all times. The love of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* is transitory. It lasts until morning, until the return of her cuckolded husband.

After the speech of the *ʾiššâ zārâ*, the father's voice returns in 7.21. He tells his son that with much seductive speech (*leqaḥ*) the foreign woman persuades the unfortunate young man. The same word, *leqaḥ*, is however used precisely for the teaching of the wise.[1] Both the wise and the evil compete in addressing the simple with *leqaḥ*. In the mouth of the foreign woman, it leads to destruction, as the father points out again at the conclusion of Proverbs 7.

> 'Her house is the way to Sheol,
> going down to the chambers of death'
> (7.27, RSV; cf. 2.18-19; 1.12-13).

The father is not simply content to denounce the seduction of the senseless young man (7.21-27), but lets Wisdom herself speak in an extended discourse which follows in Proverbs 8. We have already noted the parallels between Wisdom and the *ʾiššâ zārâ* in Proverbs 8.[2] The parallels drawn between the two would make Wisdom's claims suspect, especially since the invitation of the *ʾiššâ zārâ* is so immediately irresistible. To vindicate herself and, concomitantly, the father's instruction, Wisdom discloses her ancient origins in the hymn of 8.22-31. Through it Wisdom justifies her claims and the veracity of her words by her antiquity, by her station next to God when he ordered the world for humanity, and by her indispensable mediation between God and that humanity.[3] As I pointed out above, the appeal to

1. 1.5; 4.2; 9.9; 16.21, 33.

2. Cf. 8.1-3 and 7.8, 12; 8.6-7 and 5.3-4; 8.8 and 7.21; 8.12 and 7.11; 8.17 and 7.15.

3. For a discussion of Prov. 8.22-31, see J.N. Aletti, 'Proverbes 8.22-31: Etudes de Structure', *Bib* 57 (1976), pp. 25-37; and my own study, 'An

antiquity was the function of the grandfather's speech in 4.4-9.[1] In contrast to the *ʾiššâ zārâ* whose house is the way to Sheol, the chambers of death (7.27), Wisdom concludes her speech by promising:

'The one who finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the Lord' (8.35).

e. *Proverbs 9.16-17—the Final Speech of the ʾiššâ zārâ*

We find in Proverbs the final speeches of Wisdom and her antithesis, described here as an *ʾĕšet kᵉsîlût*, a foolish woman. Like *ʾiššâ zārâ* in 7.18, the father describes the foolish woman as loud (*hōmiyyâ*), wanton and knowing no shame (9.13). Ambiguities which testify to the polar claims between Wisdom and this woman are particularly prominent. Both have prepared banquets in their houses, ostensibly to offer nourishment and hospitality to those who partake of them[2] Wisdom sends out her maids to call from the highest places of the town (*ʿal-gappê mērômê qāret*, 9.3). The *ʾĕšet kᵉsîlût* voices her call from a seat on the high places of the town (*ʿal-kissēʾ mērômê qāret*, 9.14). They address the same audience to come to their tables, viz. the simple and those without sense:

Wisdom

'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!'
(*mî petî yāsūr hēnnâ*)
To him who is without sense (*ḥᵃsarlᵉb*) she says,
'Come (*lᵉkû*), eat my food (*lḥm*)
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
Leave simpleness and live,
and walk in the way of insight' (9.2-6).

Analysis of Prov. 8.22-31 According to Style and Structure', *ZAW* 94 (1980), pp. 48-65.

1. See above.

2. Consistently with his whole thesis, Boström (*Proverbiastudien*, pp. 156-60) argues that Wisdom's banquet is a polemical response to and substitute for the foreign banquets of the fertility cults. He sees such a banquet also in Prov. 7.14-20 (pp. 129-34). I leave open the question whether he is correct here, preferring to focus on the fact that the *ʾiššâ zārâ*, in Prov. 7 and 9 is first and foremost an *adulteress*.

Foolish Woman

'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!'
(*mî petî yāsūr hēnnâ*)
And to him who is without sense (*waḥᵃsarlᵉb* she says,
'Stolen water is sweet
And food (*lḥm*) eaten in secret is pleasant' (9.16-17).

The two speeches are structurally parallel. Both beckon the simple to turn aside into their houses. Both invite those without sense to partake of their solid and liquid refreshment. Moreover, like the sinners in 1.11 and the *ʾiššâ zārâ*, in 7.18, Wisdom invites the simple and without sense to 'Come (*lᵉkû*)!' Again we see both parties enticing the same audience, fashioning their speeches similarly.

Nevertheless, there are differences between the two. As with the other speeches of Wisdom (or her spokesperson) in the macrostructure of Proverbs 1–9, the final speech of Wisdom is longer than that of the foolish woman. She exhorts in 9.16, 'Leave simpleness, and live, and walk in the way of insight'. In contrast to the foolish woman, the food which Wisdom offers is the instruction that leads to life.

The address of *ʾēset kᵉsîlût* is the perversion of the speech of Wisdom. Her banquet parodies Wisdom's banquet. The chiastic arrangement of the food and drink offered by both parties punctuates the inversion of values: v. 5—bread (*leḥem*), wine (*yayin*) //v. 17—water (*mayim*), bread (*leḥem*). The foolish woman temptingly beguiles her prey, declaring, 'Stolen water is sweet (*mayim gᵉnûbîm yimtāqû*)'. The metaphor of 'stolen water' refers back to the father's warnings to his son against adultery in chs. 5 and 6. The father adjures his son to 'Drink water from your own cistern (5.15)'. Alerting the son to the dangers of cavorting with a neighbor's wife, the father insists, 'Do not men despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry (6.30)?' And yet the foolish woman demurs that imbibing forbidden waters is pleasurable. Furthermore, concluding her speech she declares that 'Bread eaten in secret is pleasant (*yinʾām*)'. Her assertion conflicts with her father's claim to the son that 'Knowledge will be pleasant (*yinʾām*) to your soul (2.10)'.

The foolish woman's speech seems to end on a note of ambiguity. Two women ostensibly propose to the son the very

same thing. However, the father is clear in detailing the outcome of one who is swayed by the words of the foolish woman: 'He does not know that the Shades are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol' (9.18. Cf. 2.18).

3. *Conclusion*

We have seen that a series of speeches by two different groups of people are placed strategically within the framework of Proverbs 1–9. Arranged in a chiastic fashion, these speeches highlight the father's instruction to his son about the seductive wiles of the *'iššâ zārâ*. The *'iššâ zārâ* embodies all that is evil and antithetical to the son's object of pursuit, viz. Lady Wisdom.

Three warnings against the *'iššâ zārâ* are interlaced among the first group of speeches. These warnings focus upon the dangers of the foreign woman's beguiling *words*. It is through her words that the foreign woman captivates and ensnares her victims. In the second group of speeches, the *'iššâ zārâ* herself speaks, thus verbalizing the irresistible dangers she represents. The risks which she embodies consist in the fact that her words are alarmingly similar to the words which Wisdom herself utters. Two women are thus presented for the son's consideration, both seemingly articulating the same thing. One, however, is his true beloved, intent on his welfare and happiness, while the other seductively conspires in his destruction.

The personification in a woman's form of all that is evil and destructive is, indeed, a disturbing one. Subliminally in the minds of men ever since Eve, women have been considered responsible for the world's sin and corruption. In several depictions such as the calls of the Siren and the Lorelei, it is the voice of women that holds men in thrall. So too with their biblical counterpart, the foreign woman. I have shown that it is the speeches of the *'iššâ zārâ*, that seduce the young man.

However, does not this pervasive suspicion of the words of woman cast aspersions on anything prophetic a woman might say to rock the patriarchal boat? This suspicion becomes all the more insidious, since, as we saw, the words of Lady Wisdom and the foreign woman are depicted by our author as similar in many ways. What might be accepted as wisdom from the mouth

of one woman can by the same token be discerned by men as destructive in the mouth of another woman.

Moreover, given the erotic imagery that surrounds both Lady Wisdom and the *ʾiššâ zārâ*, the most profoundly unsettling message that comes across particularly to the female reader is that only man pursues Wisdom like a lover, and it is a woman who seduces him away from her. How does one mitigate such imagery when it touches a person at the most elemental and symbolic level, for instance the sexual? Proverbs 1–9 clearly have as their referent a father teaching his son in the ways of Wisdom and the dangers of the foreign woman. Although referring to another context, Fetterly's arguments are pertinent here:

> What is essentially a simple act of identification when the reader of the story is male becomes a tangle of contradictions when the reader is female.[1]

> In such fictions the female reader is co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself.[2]

The Proverbs 1–9 texts leave the female reader with questions that still need to be resolved. Can a woman ever seek and ultimately find Wisdom? Or does she simply suffer the fate of the *ʾiššâ zārâ*, an object of aversion and ever condemned?

1. J. Fetterly, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 9.
2. Fetterly, *The Resisting Reader*, p. xii.

THE SOCIO-LITERARY PRODUCTION OF THE 'FOREIGN WOMAN' IN PROVERBS

Gale A. Yee

It pleases me to appropriate and perhaps subvert one of the hallowed academic genres of the *Doktor Vaters*, the How My Mind Has Changed/Stayed the Same forum, in responding to the first consciously feminist article of my scholarly career. I am planning to explore the foreign woman (*ʾiššâ zārâ*) again in a book that I am currently working on, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: The Symbolization of Woman as Evil in Biblical and Related Texts*, which will be published by Crossroad. I thank Dr Athalya Brenner for the opportunity to brainstorm about the foreign woman in light of the methodology that I am using in the book.

The 1989 article, '"I Have Perfumed my Bed with Myrrh"', was governed by a literary-critical methodology that restricted the analysis of the 'foreign woman' to the Proverbs text itself. It examined how the text's rhetoric played off the 'foreign woman' against Lady Wisdom in the chiastic arrangements of their respective speeches. The artistic organization of the various speeches highlighted the words of Lady Wisdom and the truth value of her claims. 'The lips of the foreign woman', on the other hand, were filled with deceit and led the unsuspecting Israelite youth to death itself.

After the research and publication of the article, I realized that a strictly literary-critical investigation of the 'foreign woman' was insufficient. I had become intrigued with the sociological approaches to the Bible in general, and to the ancient Israelite woman in particular.[1] Nevertheless, I was dissatisfied with these

1. Cf. C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

approaches, because they lacked a critical theory that linked the social world of ancient Israel to the biblical text itself. To understand the dynamics of the social construction of gender, I needed a method that combined both literary-critical and social-scientific approaches in a synthetic analysis.

I was able to find a model for such an analysis in the Marxist literary critics, especially the works of Terry Eagleton,[1] Frederic Jameson[2] and the materialist-feminists.[3] Besides offering a theoretical paradigm for a socio-literary approach to the Bible, these critics made me realize that social and economic class is a crucial variable in the investigation of gender.[4] They clarified for me the stages in the material production of ideology and how this ideology is (re)produced in the literary text. They contextualized literary ideology in the general mode of production of a particular socio-historical world. In light of current sociological and historical-critical approaches in biblical studies, I modified Marxist literary-critical models so that they too could be applied to the biblical text. I labeled the method 'ideological criticism'.[5]

1. T. Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1975); *Ideology: An Introduction* (London and New York: Verso, 1991); and *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

2. F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

3. J. Newton and D. Rosenfelt (eds.), *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985). See especially the editors' introduction, 'Toward a Materialist-Feminist Criticism', pp. xv-xxix, and M. Barrett, 'Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender', pp. 65-85, which bring feminist issues into an area of critical theory traditionally associated with economic class.

4. The important work of N.K. Gottwald, 'Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies', *JBL* 112 (1993), pp. 3-22, does not treat the relations between class and gender.

5. For an overview of the questions and presuppositions of ideological criticism and an application of the method to a biblical text, see my article, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17–21 and the Dismembered Body', in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, forthcoming). Cf. also the essays in *Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts* (*Semeia* 59 [1992]), and especially the bibliography at the end of the volume.

Investigating the ideological production of the 'foreign woman' for the Crossroad book will involve a twofold analysis. An extrinsic analysis explores the historical and social circumstances surrounding the literary production of Proverbs in general, and the social encoding of gender ideology in particular. The post-exilic period in which the book of Proverbs was produced operated under a foreign tributary mode of production.[1] I would need to study the various complex social and power relations of such a society, especially as they are linked to material and economic resources. Specific questions need to be asked: How do women actually function in this society? What access (or lack thereof) do they have to the means of production? How does this access or lack affect their class and status? What are the dominant ideologies of such a society? On whose behalf do these ideologies speak? Whose voices, what groups, do they exclude? What is the social location of the author of the text? What ideology does this author hold in relation to the dominant ideology? How do these ideologies prescribe the functions of marginalized or excluded groups, such as women? How do women collude with such a society? What are their sources of resistance? In order to reconstruct the socio-economic world of post-exilic Israel and contextualize the foreign woman, I will be profiting from the already impressive amount of literature on the era.[2]

1. For a discussion of the various modes of production operative in ancient Israel, see N.K. Gottwald, 'Sociology (Ancient Israel)', *ABD*, VI, pp. 83-57.

2. Cf., for example, the essays in P.R. Davies (ed.), *Second Temple Studies*. I. *The Persian Period* (JSOTSup, 117; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); N.K. Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40–55: An Eagletonian Reading', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 43-57; R.P. Carroll, 'The Myth of the Empty Land', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 79-93; K.D. Tollefson and H.G.M. Williamson, 'Nehemiah as Cultural Revitalization: An Anthropological Perspective', *JSOT* 56 (1992), pp. 41-68. Regarding post-exilic women and the *ʾiššâ zārâ*, in particular, see T. Eskenazi, 'Out from the Shadows: Biblical Women in the Post-Exilic Era', *JSOT* 54 (1992), pp. 25-43 (reprinted in A. Brenner [ed.], *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* [The Feminist Companion to the Bible, 5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994], pp. 252-71); C.V. Camp, 'What's So Strange about the Strange Woman?', in D. Jobling, P.L. Day and

The next stage, the intrinsic analysis, determines how the text encodes in its rhetoric the often conflicting circumstances of its material-ideological production. The text is presumed to be a symbolic resolution of real social contradictions, inventing and adapting 'solutions' to unresolved ideological dilemmas. The investigation will pay close attention to *absences* in the text, for it is in these silences that the presence of ideology is most tangibly perceived. Moreover, an in-depth study of the text's *rhetoric* is necessary. A text's rhetoric is its artful ability to persuade its audience to accept a particular ideology. In a sense, I have examined the text's rhetoric in my 1989 article. Nevertheless, I wish to explore it again from a socio-literary perspective to observe how the rhetoric conceals and represses competing voices in its attempt to resolve the contradictory opinions that they pose. In light of this, I want to mediate between two seemingly contradictory studies on the foreign woman which were published after my article. Carol Newsom's article highlights the dominant ideology of Proverbs 1–9 which interpellates the reader into the instruction between a father and his son.[1] Athalya Brenner tries to recover the suppressed voice of woman in this text.[2]

In concluding this response, I am reminded of what I always tell my students: learning is a life-long process. One rediscovers anew insights into 'old' material. I look forward with eagerness as I encounter again an old friend, the 'foreign woman'.

G.T Sheppard (eds.), *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), pp. 17-31; J. Blenkinsopp, 'The Social Context of the "Outsider Woman" in Proverbs 1–9', *Bib* 72 (1991), pp. 457-73.

1. C. Newsom, 'Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9', P.L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 142-60.

2. A. Brenner, 'Proverbs 1–9: An F. Voice?', in A. Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), pp. 113-30.

WISE AND STRANGE: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE FEMALE IMAGERY IN PROVERBS IN LIGHT OF TRICKSTER MYTHOLOGY*

Claudia V. Camp

Cross-cultural studies have, in recent years, generated much enthusiasm among biblical scholars. They have been responded to with equally strong and well-taken words of caution about respect for cultural differences and for variations in apparent patterns of social behavior or mythological imagery. Nowhere is such caution more well-placed than in an attempt to identify elements of the trickster motif in a cultural tradition such as the Bible, which does not have any one character clearly identified as such, unlike the cycles of trickster stories that appear, for example, among many native North American tribes and also among certain African peoples (see Thompson,[1] Pelton[2]). The Bible's lack of such a figure is only the first of several methodological difficulties that need at least an acknowledgment before one succumbs to the siren of comparison.

A second difficulty is that, even where comparative mythologists agree on the existence of a trickster, this figure is an extremely elusive and changeable one. What exactly makes a trickster a trickster? The trickster is often portrayed as an enormous buffoon who wanders the earth getting himself and others into trouble, largely because of his outlandish appetite for

* Originally published in J. Bos and J.C. Exum (eds.), *Reasoning with the Foxes: Female Wit in a World of Male Power, Semeia* 42 (1988), pp. 14-36.

1. S. Thompson (ed.), *Tales of the North American Indians* (repr.; Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1966 [1929]).

2. R.D. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* (Hermeneutics: Studies in the History of Religions; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

food and sex. Although he is called the trickster, as often as not he is more the fool, one who gets tricks played on him as well as tricking others. The trickster is a breaker of all social boundaries: not guided by any recognizable sense of good and evil, he flouts religious taboos and conventions of proper sexual behavior, even to the point of changing sex and becoming a man's 'wife' for a period of time in one Winnebago episode.[1] In some folklore traditions, this radical 'outside-the-normness' of the trickster results in his being cast as an animal rather than as a human, although always as an animal who interacts with other characters using the structures of human speech and society (even if only to abuse them).

Oddly, however (at least to the modern Western mind), trickster stories are not found threatening by their audiences but rather extremely humorous. Even more oddly, antics of this amoral buffoon are sometimes associated with the most serious tasks. Either an actual deity himself, or intimately associated with deity, the trickster regularly participates in the creation or transformation of the world, providing it with its basic cosmic and social structures, cultural knowledge and deepest wisdom.

There does not seem to be any one 'ideal' trickster type. Rather, any given trickster figure may comprise a shifting combination of several, but not necessarily all, characteristics of the general type. We may take some comfort, then, that one may analyze biblical texts under the aegis of the trickster mythologem without making absolute claims about whether a given character is or is not a trickster. The important task is to identify elements of the paradigm and examine how they function in relationship to each other and to other aspects of the culture.[2] It is with such caution that I hope to treat the female imagery in Proverbs, where there are at least two major objections to finding a trickster. The most critical one is formal. These texts are not oral, folkloric narratives but literary, instructional poems. Secondly, and relatedly, they do not exhibit the non-judgmental hilarity that almost always characterizes trickster tales (though not always, as Pelton's presentation of one West African trickster

1 P. Radin (ed.), *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), pp. 22-24.

2. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 14-17.

shows[1]). They are, rather, highly moralistic in tone and intent. Nonetheless, as I shall suggest, the presentation of the female figures in Proverbs 1–9 exhibits some striking similarities to the traditional trickster.

A third methodological problem lies not only in the diversity of the trickster, but also that of his interpreters. Anthropologists' treatments of the significance of the trickster have ranged from the psychic developmentalism of Radin and Jung[2] to the mathematical structuralism of Lévi-Strauss.[3] My own intellectual preference and, hence, the direction of this essay run toward the cultural hermeneutics approach of Robert Pelton. Unlike Radin and Jung, Pelton attempts to explain the often contradictory elements of the trickster myths holistically, rather than explaining them away in an evolutionary scheme that posits a development from animal to human, from amoral buffoon to a savior-transformer. Resisting Lévi-Strauss's tendency toward abstraction, Pelton insists on interpreting the trickster motifs with respect to their native cultural context. One may generalize about the trickster as a combination liar, buffoon and culture-hero, but these traits are always narratively manifest in culturally specific ways that enable a given culture to interpret itself to itself. This concern for cultural specificity built into a comparative method is, at the very least, reassuring and, at best, should enable us to deepen our understanding of Israel's efforts to interpret its own situation.

Finally, we must take consideration of the fact that the biblical figures to whom I wish to apply the trickster paradigm are female, rather than male, which makes them unique in any comparative studies with which I am familiar.[4] The significance of this fact is open to question. We must recognize, first of all, that trickster mythology can be applied to male as well as to female characters in the Bible. Jacob, for instance, would be a

1. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 164-222.

2. C. Jung, 'On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure', trans. R.F.C. Hull, in Radin (ed.), *The Trickster*, pp. 195-211.

3. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (trans. C. Jacobson and B.G. Schoepf; New York: Basic Books, 1963).

4. I would like to thank Carole Fontaine for stressing this distinction for me in a personal communication.

prime candidate. Thus, the Bible does not simply reverse the typical expectations. Nonetheless, the Bible does have a tradition of 'tricky' or deceitful women that should tell us something about Israel's understanding of itself and its women.[1] Furthermore, the trickster is often portrayed as an animal, a being on the boundary between the human and the natural worlds. Sherry Ortner has demonstrated a certain proclivity to relate 'female' to 'nature' in contrast to the connection of 'male' with 'culture'.[2] Her analysis raises the possibility that female imagery, in characters exhibiting other elements of the trickster pattern, functions similarly to the theriomorphism of other tricksters.

While attempting to bear these cautionary notes in mind, it will be the thesis of this paper that a comparison of various manifestations of the trickster figure from comparative myth and folklore with the presentations of personified Wisdom and the Strange Woman in the book of Proverbs provides useful interpretive insights into the biblical material. Moreover, this comparison is informative not only at the several points where biblical female imagery fits the typical trickster model, but also where it does not. There are five interrelated characteristics of the trickster that provide categories for analyzing personified Wisdom, the Strange Woman, and their relationship to each other.

1. *Duality*

The first and most all-embracing of these characteristics, recognized by virtually all commentators, is the basic duality of the trickster. Reading through the collection of any given society's trickster tales, one always finds not only the fooler, but also the fool, both a creator and a disrupter of order. The female imagery in Proverbs also plays upon opposites, personified

1. C.V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Bible and Literature Series, 11; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), pp. 124-40.

2. S.B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', in M. Zimbalist Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds.), *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 67-88.

Wisdom representing creation, love, life, truth, social order and wisdom, while the Strange Woman represents death, falsehood, social disruption and folly. The concern for the proper boundaries of sexual behavior, flaunted so gleefully by the trickster, is also quite evident in Proverbs. Female Wisdom is associated with the wife whom one is to love faithfully (4.6; 5.15-19; 7.4; 8.17), while the Strange Woman allures with provocative descriptions of illicit sex (7.10-20).

The relationship of the positive and negative elements of the trickster has been a subject of debate among anthropologists. Paul Radin argues, for example, based on certain native American cycles, that the connection of the trickster with cosmogonic activity is a secondary accretion to the trickster mythology, a position which seems to have a fair amount of textual support in the traditions he studied.[1] Much more speculative, and also suspect because of its evolutionary presupposition, is his assertion that the trickster's 'culture-hero' traits—the various ways he orders or initiates important social structures or useful cultural objects—are later 'developments' from an 'original' conception of a primordial person obsessed by hunger, wanderlust and sexuality, purposeless and little differentiated from the animal world.[2] Radin suggests that the elevation of the trickster to divine status with a role in creation was the work of an ancient 'priest-thinker' trying to assimilate the even older myths into an aboriginal theological system.[3]

Unfortunately, this postulated evolution of the trickster literature does not explain the persistent attractiveness of the figure in his dual roles. Pelton's project takes on this issue with the assumption that members of pre-modern societies sought after a unity of experience in their lives and mythologies and, therefore, that the interpreter 'can best approach the many aspects of pre-modern religious life by searching for the logic that knits diversity together'.[4] I should make clear that Pelton does not imply any particular form of modern logic in this statement. The questions, rather, are those of how any given

1. Radin (ed.), *The Trickster*, pp. 124-31, 155-69.
2. Radin (ed.), *The Trickster*, pp. 165-68.
3. Radin (ed.), *The Trickster*, p. 164.
4. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 11.

society structures the diverse and sometimes contradictory elements of the trickster pattern, how these elements work in relation to each other and to other social structures, and thus, how that society uses the trickster to uncover and interpret the meaning of its life and world.[1]

Unlike the trickster who unites this duality into a single paradoxical entity, the female characterization in Proverbs divides it into two distinct figures. These opposites nonetheless 'attract'. J.-N. Aletti has noted with particular astuteness the many connecting links between the positive and negative female imagery in chs. 1–9. He argues that the editor of this material has created a very deliberate confusion between Wisdom and the Strange Woman through the ambiguous use of certain vocabulary.[2] Prov. 4.8 assures the young man that Wisdom will honor him if he *embraces* (חחבקנה) her, while 5.20 questions why he would *embrace* (תחבק) the bosom of the Strange Woman. Even more emphatically, one must *grasp* (החזק) Wisdom and Instruction (3.18; 4.13) and expect to be *grasped* (החזקה) by the Strange Woman (7.13). All this grasping and grabbing will take place 'in the street' and 'in the marketplace' where *both* Wisdom and the Strange Woman are to be found (1.20-21; 7.12). After the encounter in the public place, both female figures invite the listener to their respective houses (the Strange Woman or Folly's in 7.15-20 and 9.14-16; Wisdom's in 8.34 and 9.1-6). Both Wisdom and Folly offer *bread* (לחם) at their banquets (9.5, 17). The imagery of water is used to allure the young man to his own wife:

> Drink water from your own cistern,
> flowing water from your own well (5.15);

as well as to seduce him to Folly's house:

> Stolen water is sweet,
> and bread eaten in secret is pleasant (9.17).

With either the Strange Woman or his wife he can *fill himself* (נרוה) with *love* (דדים, 7.18) or *breasts* (דדיה, 5.19, perhaps a scribal

1. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 16.
2. J.-N. Alleti, 'Séduction et parole en Proverbes I–IX', *VT* 27 (1977), pp. 132-34.

error, but carrying the same implications!). Finally, the word used to describe the truthful teaching of the sage (לֶקַח) is the same as that employed for the seductive speech of the Strange Woman who is said to be 'wily of heart' (1.5; 4.2; 9.9; 7.21).

Comparison with the trickster invites the interpreter of Proverbs to take seriously the literary unity of the Strange Woman and personified Wisdom before separating them too quickly into 'good' and 'evil'. I have suggested elsewhere that other biblical imagery for women points in this same direction. Like the trickster and the Strange Woman—and indeed, by association, like Wisdom herself[1]—Tamar (Gen. 38), Ruth and Judith all break their society's boundaries on sexual behavior in order to accomplish good for themselves, for society and, ultimately, for Yahweh. Like the trickster also, Tamar and Ruth, in particular, undertake their risky strategies primarily out of their own self interest. Only secondarily and unintentionally do their actions benefit the larger group.[2] Yet the biblical authors, like the tricksters' tradents, understand the women's intentions and their effects as of one piece.

This subtle underlying unity of personified Wisdom and the Strange Woman provides a counterweight to the more polemical overtones of ancient instruction ('Understand, my son, that there are two distinct groups of women in the world...') and modern critique ('Look, my daughter, how men have divided us into virgins and whores...'). Such a perspective allows an interpretation of female Wisdom and the Strange Woman not along traditional patriarchal lines of 'virgin versus whore' or 'the ideal woman on a pedestal versus the degraded woman of male experience', but rather as a representation of the necessary complementarity of human experience. If Israel, in splitting the typical paradoxically single trickster, has to some degree denied rather than affirmed this complementarity, we now at least have a basis for a specific and constructive critique that goes beyond the limitations of a polemic against patriarchy in general (cf. Johanson's admonition to take on this task[3]). The

1. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, pp. 129-33.
2. Cf. Radin (ed.), *The Trickster*, p. 125.
3. S. Johanson, '"Herstory" as History: A New Field or Another

remaining sections of this essay will address some of the different aspects of this fundamental feature of duality. In particular, an issue that emerges in the Proverbs material is that of how Israel has here structured its experience of the conjunction, as well as the opposition, of good and evil, and what role female imagery has played in that structuring.

2. *Order and Disorder*

As we have already noted, the trickster represents the forces of creation and destruction, order and disorder, on both the cosmic and social levels. Although the temptation here, once again, is to see two 'originally' distinct characters at work, the structure of many trickster episodes reveals the inherent unity of these two movements. Raven, the North American Haida trickster, for example, begins his creative work by skinning a new-born child and appropriating its skin for himself, and then stealing and eating people's eyeballs![1] Similarly, the trickster's introduction of valuable tools or social customs to a society often takes place without any intentionality on his part and, indeed, often as the result of some otherwise unpleasant trick he has played on someone.[2] Occasionally, this intermixture of ordering and disordering activities results in an ironic double paradox, as in one of Pelton's parade examples, the conflict between Ananse, the trickster of the West African Ashante tribe and the misanthropic character, Hate-to-be-contradicted.[3] Hate-to-be-contradicted lives on the outskirts of society and fools visitors into contradicting him by telling outlandish stories, and then kills them. Hate-to-be-contradicted is outdone by his own contradiction of the even wilder lies told by Ananse, who then takes license to kill him. Having performed this apparent favor for society, however, Ananse cuts his antagonist into bits and 'sows' contradiction among humans!

Contrary, perhaps, to our expectations, the Ashante do not

Fad?', in B. Carroll (ed.), *Liberating Women's History* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 400-30.

1. Radin (ed.), *The Trickster*, pp. 156-58.
2. Radin (ed.), *The Trickster*, p. 125.
3. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 25-27.

condemn Ananse for his introduction of contradiction into human discourse, but rather delight in this expression of what they know to be their reality. In this, as in other stories, the trickster embraces and embodies the paradox of order and disorder.[1] Kerenyi writes,

> Disorder belongs to the totality of life, and the spirit of this disorder is the Trickster. His function...is to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible, within the bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted.[2]

The important point is that the forces of disorder are brought inside human territory. Ananse and Hate-to-be-contradicted behave in virtually the same manner, except for the fact that the latter refuses human intercourse while the former insists on it, even in its negativity. 'The true limen,' suggests Pelton, 'lies not on or outside the margins of society, but in its midst.'[3]

That personified Wisdom and the Strange Woman represent forces of order and disorder is abundantly clear. Wisdom participates in the ordering process of Yahweh's creation (8.22-31) and is responsible for the governance of society (8.15-16) and the well-being of her followers (8.18, 35-36). The doubled epithet repeatedly applied to the negative female figure—strange woman, foreign woman—captures in its very ambiguity the multi-leveled nature of the threat she presents to the orders of life and society.[4] She guards the gateway to death (2.18-19; 9.18), countering Wisdom's offer of life. This death, though imaged in virtually mythological terms, has a concrete social form: being 'cut off from the land' (2.22) and descending to 'the point of utter ruin in the assembled congregation' (5.14). Clearly, the community feels a threat to itself in the actions of the individual.

For all these obvious oppositions between the ordering of Woman Wisdom and the disordering of the Strange Woman, the trickster paradigm invites us to consider the intersections of

1. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 29.
2. K. Kerenyi, 'The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology', trans. R.F.C. Hull, in Radin (ed.), *The Trickster*, p. 185.
3. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 37.
4. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 115-20.

these forces as well. The Strange Woman, in spite of her 'foreignness', exists very much within the boundaries of society. She appears in the public places of the community and invites people to her house, just as Woman Wisdom does. In portraying the Strange Woman in this manner, the Israelite sages have not excluded foreignness, but, in fact, let it 'in'. In so doing, they have acknowledged the reality that a system of order cannot afford to exclude anomaly without ultimately being overwhelmed by it.[1] Here the apparently negative Strange Woman enacts one of the paradoxically positive roles of the trickster, symbolizing the manner in which people try to integrate disorder, the anomalous, into their daily lives.

The house and paths of the Strange Woman, moreover, bring within the boundaries of Israel's communal apprehension the ultimate disorder, namely, death. Trickster figures are often credited with bringing death into human existence and, thereby, capturing death's 'centripetality' for the center of life and guaranteeing life's 'eternal reirruption'.[2] If this evaluation of death seems a bit *too* positive with respect to Proverbs, we should nonetheless remember that the 'first woman Eve' accepted death as the price of a fully human life. The entry of death into human life through the mediation of the woman and the serpent (certainly another trickster figure!) goes hand in hand with the acquisition of knowledge of good and evil which, for the sage, means life. At the heart of wisdom thought, then, lies the trickster's paradox: death does yield life. (See below for further consideration of the Eden story.)

Death as a metaphor in Proverbs 1–9 may be less focused on biological death than on the related connotations of separation from deity and community, perhaps more terrifying ideas to Israel.[3] If we assume that the book of Proverbs became prominent religious literature after the exile, Israel's experience of communal 'death' in Babylon (Ezek. 37.1-14) and their subsequent struggle to maintain an identifiable community in

1. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 251.

2. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 263; cf. Radin (ed.), *The Trickster*, p. 147.

3. Cf. L.R. Bailey, Sr, *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 41.

postexilic Judah may also be reflected in this material. In that case the acknowledgment of the Strange Woman, with all her danger, inside the community's boundaries becomes all the more striking. And, in spite of the danger, this acknowledgment is quite complete, as witnessed by the poem in Proverbs 7, which paints a shameless picture of her attractions (vv. 13-20) before warning of her consequences. Knowledge of evil must accompany knowledge of good in the search for wisdom and life. Without an appreciation for the strange, a society does not know its own boundaries.

To complete the paradox of order and disorder encompassed by the female imagery in Proverbs, we must recognize not only the Strange Woman's *inclusion* within Israel's social boundaries, but also personified Wisdom's *transgression* of them. She is, first of all, one of the most universal, non-xenophobic images in the Hebrew Bible, comparable in this respect to Second Isaiah's Servant. She crosses, moreover, the most fundamental line of all, that between creator and created, and in both directions, as is typical of tricksters. She is at one and the same time human wisdom elevated to the word of God (witness the canonical status of Proverbs) and divine wisdom come to reside among humans. But, contrary to expectations, her elevation does not result in death (contrast the king of Tyre, Ezek. 28), nor is her 'descent' from heaven the result of anything other than her own initiative (Prov. 8.30-31). The boundary-crossing which ought to destroy instead becomes a source of life, but we can see the true value of this life only if we also recognize the dangerously disordering process through which it becomes available.

3. *Language of Wisdom and Deceit*

Pelton argues that the bringing of reality to language and the definition of human being as being engaged in discourse, usually accomplished through foolishness or deceit, is one of the hallmarks of the trickster. 'The trickster brings to light all nonsense so that all might become language and therefore human'.[1] The Ashante's Ananse provides a variety of amusing examples. In addition to introducing contradiction into human discourse,

1. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 242.

Ananse also saves speech for human beings by tricking a monster bird into returning the jaws he stole from human faces.[1] He is also associated with the spread of wisdom, which he initially tries to hide by putting it in a gourd at the top of a tree. Aggravated because his son can climb the tree better than he, however, he breaks the gourd and hurls its contents to the earth. In a wonderfully complex episode, Ananse helps the Sun assume his rightful position as High God in the pantheon and settler of human disputes, but again by trickery. He steals a certain word from the Creator God that Sun must know in order to prove his worthiness for the position, and then aids Sun's memory of it by fashioning a drum whose resonance imitates the sound of the word. Pelton comments that,

> the 'light' needed to fashion order out of the tangle of human wills can only by focussed through a duplicity that restarts the processes of speech... Ananse rejects truth in favor of lying, but only for the sake of speech...[2]

Furthermore, as a reward for his success in this episode, Ananse's name is given to all the stories—*anansesem*—through which the Ashante remember and shape their culture.[3]

These Ashante tales represent only a few of the episodes associating various West African tricksters with language. Compare also Pelton's discussions of the Fon's Legba, the 'divine linguist';[4] the Yoruba's Eshu, the introducer of divination;[5] or the Dogon's Ogo-Yurugu who, with his twin, possesses the forty-eight categories into which the Dogon divide all speech.[6]

The connections of personified Wisdom and the Strange Woman to language are numerous and, again, more subtle and complex than might appear at first glance. Woman Wisdom announces herself as a speaker of truth and a hater of perverted speech (8.6-9, 13). Her instruction brings happiness and life (8.32-35). The invitations of the Strange Woman (or Woman Folly in 9.13) are, of course, understood as seductions that lead

1. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 40.
2. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 50-51.
3. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 27-31, 224.
4. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 72.
5. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 133-48.
6. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 188-89.

to death. We must, however, consider the underlying currents that partially blur this surface opposition.

Like Ananse, Woman Wisdom presides over and authorizes a tradition[1] that is terribly concerned with language and its proper use. The basic values as represented in the proverb collections are to speak as little as possible (10.19; 13.3; 17.25; 29.20; *passim*), as effectively as possible (15.23; 25.11, 15; *passim*), and to recognize that no matter what one says, Yahweh may have something else in mind (21.1, 2; 20.21; *passim*). Righteous speech is also of great importance (10.11, 20, 21, 31, 32; *passim*), but it shares center stage with words fitly or efficaciously spoken. The moral value of proverbial language is occasionally ambiguous, moreover. The observation that 'a bribe is a magic stone in the eye of him who gives it' (17.8) creates almost as much temptation as the description of the Strange Woman in Proverbs 7. Finally, proverbs that counsel opposite courses of action (presumably depending on the situation; cf. 26.4, 5) indicate an awareness that this form of commonsense truth is to some degree relative and immethodical.[2] The tradition personified by Woman Wisdom recognizes, then, a complexity in human existence and in the speech which articulates it.

A similar ambiguity exists in the proverb collection with respect to the relationship of folly and wickedness. Although both are evaluated negatively, folly does not entail the dire consequences associated with Woman Folly in 9.13, who opens the same doorway to death as does the Strange Woman in other poems. R.B.Y. Scott has noted that the contrasted pairs of righteousness and wickedness, on the one hand, and wisdom and folly, on the other, are not interchangeable in the collection.[3] The fool can expect poverty and disrepute, but this does not

1. M. Gilbert, 'Le discours de la Sagesse en Proverbes, 8.', in *La sagesse de l'ancien testament* (BETL, 51; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979), p. 218; B. Lang, *Frau Weisheit* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1975), pp. 170-71.

2. C. Geertz, 'Common Sense as a Cultural System', *Antioch Review* 35 (1975), pp. 23-24.

3. R.B.Y. Scott, 'Wise and Foolish, Righteous and Wicked', in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (VTSup, 23; Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 153-54.

carry an explicitly religious value judgment with it.[1] Frequently, the actions of fools are simply described (12.15, 23; 13.16; 15.21; 18.2) as if no further comment were necessary, and folly is considered its own reward (16.22). The warnings against the consequences of folly, both to the fool and to others, are sometimes couched in images that border on the amusing and, indeed, remind us of the trickster.

> Like one who binds the stone in the sling
> is the one who gives honor to a fool (26.8).

> Like a dog that returns to his vomit
> is a fool that repeats his folly (26.11).

The sluggard, in particular, is depicted in laughable images (22.13; 26.13, 14, 15), and there is one character who is even worse than the fool:

> Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes?
> There is more hope for a fool than for him (26.12).

Although this nuance and complexity found in the tradition is seemingly reduced by the either–or opposition of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman in the poems of chs. 1–9, even here the matter is not quite so simple. As Aletti's analysis pointed out (see above), the one who wishes to distinguish between these two female figures must first contend with their similarities. Aletti argues further that this potential confusion of values was quite intentional on the part of the sage, who used it as one means of emphasizing the crucial importance of language to society as a whole and in the endeavors of the wisdom tradition in particular and, for these very reasons, the dangers of its abuse.[2]

The crowning irony in this nexus of language, wisdom and deceit comes in Prov. 18.21, which introduces yet another female image, 'Lady Tongue'.[3]

1. Scott, 'Wise and Foolish, Righteous and Wicked', p. 158.
2. Alleti, 'Seduction et parole en Proverbes I–IX', pp. 139-40.
3. J.G. Williams, *Women Recounted: Narrative Thinking and the God of Israel* (Bible and Literature Series, 6; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982), p. 91.

> Death and life are in the hand of the tongue,
> and her lovers will eat of her fruit.

Those who are lovers of language, and the sages are most certainly among them, can expect to taste the fruits of both the Strange Woman's deceit, namely death, and Woman Wisdom's truth, the life that comes from Yahweh (8.35). The fundamental duality that exists in human intercourse is inescapable. Language may, in the abstract, separate truth and deceit, but in experience the two often become one.

This duality is often treated in the Bible with greater appreciation and, sometimes, humor than it is in Proverbs 1–9. This is nowhere more true than in stories of some of the female characters who are related in theme and imagery to personified Wisdom and the Strange Woman.[1] I have already alluded to the social boundary-defying sexual activity of Tamar, Ruth and Judith. In this context, we need also note that the ploys of Tamar and Judith are accompanied by deceitful speech, as is also true in Rebekah's scheme to win the first-born's blessing for Jacob (Gen. 27). Esther provides another example of cagey locution and circumlocution which, while not quite deceitful, is, at the appropriate moments, less than completely straightforward.[2] Finally, in yet another twist on truth, deceit and their anticipated consequences, the wise (but calculating) Abigail kills her husband Nabal (whose name means 'the fool') with the absolute, unvarnished truth (1 Sam. 25.37-38)!

4. *Theodicy*

Although I have yet to see the word 'theodicy' used by anthropologists in their studies of tricksters, it should be clear from the themes of order and disorder, truth and falsehood which we have already discussed that the question of good and evil, and their relationship to the deity, cannot lurk far in the background. We have seen enough of the trickster to know that, in him, various cultural understandings of good and evil merge in complex ways. What is less obvious, and, indeed varies from

1. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 124-40.
2. Cf. S. Talmon, '"Wisdom" in the Book of Esther', *VT* 13 (1963), p. 437.

culture to culture, is the role of the deity in all of this. Sometimes the trickster *is* a deity who represents a primordial blend of power, creativity and destructiveness; for example, the Haida's Raven.[1] At other times, he is being created by the High God for a special purpose. In an episode of the Winnebago trickster mythology, Earthmaker tells the trickster, Wakdjunkaga:

> Firstborn, you are the oldest of all those I have created. I created you good-natured: I made you a sacred person. I sent you to the earth to remain there so that human beings would listen to you, honor you and obey you and that you might teach them by what means they could secure a happy life...[2]

Earthmaker goes on to chastise gently Wakdjunkaga for bringing trouble on himself by making light of the deity's creation. Radin notes, however, that even within one tradition, interpretations of the trickster can vary. By the early twentieth century, some Winnebagos influenced by syncretized Christian beliefs had moralized the trickster stories as examples of inappropriate behavior, or even equated him with Satan.[3]

The pattern varies again in the case of Ogo-Yurugu, the trickster of the West African Dogon tribe. In Dogon mythology, Ogo-Yurugu is one of a set of primordial twins who rebels against the High God, Amma, his creator, because of his fear that Amma would deny him a mate. Although Ogo-Yurugu is finally defeated by Amma and banished from the divine and human domains (he becomes a fox), his attempts to wrest control from Amma result in the shape of the world as the Dogon know it

> ...[T]he Dogon too must cope with solitude, sexual anxiety and death. They do not, however, look at these experiences or the rebellion that caused them as unequivocally evil. Without Ogo's search for his female twin nothing would be what it is, and even as Yurugu [the fox], he continues to reveal and enlarge the boundaries of life. The 'beneficent ferment' of Ogo's opposition complements the orderly graciousness of Amma.[4]

1. See above; cf. Radin (ed.), *The Trickster*, pp. 156-58.
2. Radin (ed.), *The Trickster*, p. 150.
3. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 148-50.
4. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 207.

The Judeo-Christian reader of the Wakdjunkaga and Ogo-Yurugu stories is inevitably tempted to make comparisons with the biblical story of creation and 'fall'. This placement of the trickster in the role of the archetypal human would not be altogether inaccurate. Over and over his interpreters comment that the trickster's role is that of making the human world human. The questions raised by this mythology for the biblical tradition are: how evil is evil, and what does God have to do with this dimension of human experience?

According to one interpretive stance, the negative aspects of the human condition are punishment for the sin of disobedience to God, enacted out of human free will and thus absolving God of responsibility in the matter. Although on one level, such an interpretation seems comparable to the trickster stories of rebellion against, or at least carelessness of, the High God's purposes, it does not cope well with their lightness, humor and irony, and their acceptance of human 'evil'. Nor does such a position deal well with certain intra-biblical dilemmas, for example, the terrible logical problem of the existence of evil under the reign of a good and all-powerful God, or the occasional biblical revelation of God's maleficence (especially in Job and Qoheleth).

The trickster stories represent a different approach to the problem of evil. This approach is more descriptive (being often etiological) than prescriptive, and it is less concerned with explaining evil than it is with interpreting the human condition of which evil is a part. The paradoxical unity of good and evil in the trickster is basically a manifestation of the way human life is. This approach also, then, begs the metaphysical question of the relationship of a good God to evil, but it does recognize the reality of a human experience of evil which is not explicable in the terms of a simplistic theory of retribution. In many respects, I would suggest, the commonsense, human-oriented attitude to this issue found in the trickster stories is most closely akin to that expressed in biblical material associated with wisdom.[1]

We have already noted some of the moral ambiguities in the

1. I recognize the difficulties in defining 'Wisdom literature' or the 'Wisdom tradition' in the Bible. For our present purposes, we need no more precision than that of broad similarities of vocabulary and theme.

proverb collection. This ambiguity is coupled with variant evaluations of vocabulary associated with wisdom, both within Proverbs itself[1] and elsewhere as, for example, in the Succession Narrative.[2] Nowhere is this more clear than in the Eden story, where the crafty (ערום)[3] serpent leads the way to both human mortality and wisdom. In addition to the traditional interpretation of this story as one of sin and punishment, G. Mendenhall has also found here a scathing critique of wisdom.[4] I am not convinced that either of these perspectives is completely correct.

The simplistic notion of sin and punishment does not deal with the complexities of the text, both in what it does and does not say. First, it does not deal with God's ultimate responsibility for the situation. Who, after all, created the serpent and his intellectual abilities, and provided the temptation of a forbidden tree? The Eden story is really quite like a trickster tale in this respect, concerned not with explaining or rationalizing every logical possibility of a situation but rather with enfolding in an imaginative, narrative embrace the 'way things are' for human beings, in other words, with describing and interpreting the human condition. The text is curiously silent about Yahweh's emotions in reaction to the human deed, especially with regard to any 'wrath' one might expect the deity to feel. Yahweh simply asks what has occurred (3.11, 13), describes what every Israelite knows to be the nature of existence (3.14-19), and then makes clothes for the man and woman (3.21). The work of P. Trible on the literary features of this material and C. Meyers on its sociological context makes abundantly clear both the descriptive, rather than prescriptive, nature of the text, and its concern

1. W. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 10-22.

2. R.N. Whybray, *The Succession Narrative: A Study of II Sam. 9–20 and I Kings 1 and 2* (SBT, Second Series, 9; Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1968), pp. 57-59.

3. Compare the positive evaluations of this word in Prov. 12.3; 13.16; 14.14; *passim*.

4. G.E. Mendenhall, 'The Shady Side of Wisdom', in H.N. Bream, R.D. Heim and C. Moore, *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Essays in Honor of Jacob M. Myers* (Gettysburg Theological Studies IV; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), pp. 319-34.

to bring meaning (not merely condemnation) to the brokenness of human life.

> The elementary questions about life and its hardships, about the endless and excessive efforts to survive—these are the human enigmas of existence to which this passage speaks. The gnawing WHY—why is life so hard for both men and women, why is there so much to be done for survival alone—is dealt with here.[1]

The answer? Simply that 'the human condition is ordained by God and must be accepted as such'.[2]

Is, then, Genesis 2–3 a condemnation of human wisdom? It is true that wisdom that is 'wise in its own eyes' and that does not allow for the disposing of Yahweh as well as the proposing of human beings is condemned by the sages, not only in the critical books of Job and Qoheleth but also in that bastion of human optimism, Proverbs itself. The universality of this critique in the wisdom tradition suggests to me that Mendenhall's interpretation is off-target and that, once again, Genesis's intent is to understand, not condemn, human reality as the author knows it. Yes, the Eden story does associate the acquisition of human wisdom with death, but the rest of the Hebrew Bible makes clear that the mere fact of human mortality is not overly troubling to the ancient Israelites.[3] Death, too, is part of the 'way life is'. More importantly, I think, Genesis 3 reveals that wisdom, like death—and also like the hard work of farming, the bearing of children, the wearing of clothes, and so on—is part of *human* life.

The wisdom tradition was willing both to exalt and criticize itself, but both evaluations were made from the perspective of human beings. Even the God of the whirlwind who appears in Job, I would argue, is a God poetically articulated from a

1. C. Meyers, 'Gender Roles and Genesis 3:16 Revisited', in C. Meyers and M. O'Connor (eds.), *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth* (FS D.N. Freedman; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), p. 348. Repr. in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (The Feminist Companion to the Bible, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 118-41.

2. Meyers, 'Gender Roles', pp. 348-49.

3. Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, pp. 47-57.

consciously human experience, with no pretense of recording direct divine revelation. The wisdom tradition articulates various facets of the interface between an ambiguous human wisdom and a God who should be good and just, but who is not always so experienced. Wisdom *is* theodicy, not conceived as a metaphysical problem, but experienced in the way we live.

Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman in Proverbs also speak to this condition, as always, paradoxically. On the one hand, they represent the idealized conceptualization of good and evil: ever separate, consequences ever inevitable. Under the surface, however, as Aletti's analysis makes clear, lurks the dangerous knowledge that life does not always work so neatly. The Strange Woman is such a horror because her words are so close to the truth, not the truth of tidy theological packages, but the truth as humans really experience it. Husbands do go away on business, and strange beds do offer delight. The depth of the paradox only becomes visible when we acknowledge the unity of the female imagery that embraces the duality. In their embodiment, Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman are one, a fact that their speeches only partially mitigate. As woman, her dual path runs from heaven to Sheol and back, never failing to pass through human territory. The unity of the imagery is important for the same reason the trickster is important. It is a way of representing, and thus encompassing, the anomaly that exists in human life.

The female imagery does not, then, simply mediate between the human and the divine, as I have previously suggested,[1] or only between human life and death (see above), but also unites divinity with death. In the connection of this imagery *both* to Yahweh *and* Sheol, the full range of human experience of anomaly is incorporated, not only that of the material and social world, but that of the spirit as well. The ambiguity of the female imagery reflects the moral ambiguity of the deity which stands in the shadows of Eden and bursts forth in the Joban whirlwind. It thereby acknowledges what all humans experientially know: we cannot receive good from the hand of Yahweh and not receive evil also.

1. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 272-81.

The unity of this imagery brings a new meaning to death as well. If the woman whose dwelling place is in Sheol is, on one level, the same as she who plays before Yahweh, and if this woman is the human reflection of the nature of God, then God's presence in Sheol is also affirmed. Such a theological perception is typically either denied in the Bible (Job 7.21; Ps. 88.3-5, 10-12 [Heb. 4-6, 11-13]; Isa. 38.18-19) or, in the case of Job, tantalizingly tasted (15.13; 28.22). In Proverbs, by means of the female imagery, the chaotic anomaly of death is brought fully within the compass not only of human but also of divine experience. The female imagery in Proverbs anticipates the Gospel of John in more ways than one! The words of Pelton regarding the trickster may be accurately applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom.

> [The trickster] affirms the doubleness of the real and denies every one dimensional image of it. If he struggles with the High God and causes pain and death to enter the world, spoiling primordial bliss, his quarrel is not with the divine order as such, but with a false human image of the sacred, one that cannot encompass suffering, disorder, and the ultimate mess of death.[1] No less than Job, though through very different literary means, do the women of Proverbs participate in this struggle.

5. *Liminality*

The notion of liminality is derived by its greatest conceptualist, Victor Turner, from the middle phase of the rite of passage described by A. van Gennep. The first phase involves separation 'from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions... or from both'. Then,

> during the intervening liminal period, the characteristics of the ritual subject...are ambiguous: he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state.

Finally, the person is reincorporated into a stable, but new, social or cultural state.[2] It is the middle phase that is of concern here.

1. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 262-63.
2. V. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1977; Cornell Paperbacks, 1969), pp. 94-95.

> Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.[1]

Turner does not limit his concept of liminality to ritual passage, however, but rather applies it to any 'anti-structural' person, group, condition, or cultural form that marks a transition from old to new.[2] One common denominator is the social recognition that liminality involves *danger* to the social order, but that this danger must be accepted if the order is to sustain continued life. It is this broad use of the term that is employed by Pelton to understand many dimensions of the trickster tales. One of these, the inclusion of disorder with the boundaries of order, has already received attention in my discussion. Two others deserve consideration: the imaging of the trickster in animal forms (and the attendant question of the significance of the female imagery in Proverbs) and the mediation of the trickster between the realms of the sacred and daily life.

The connection of liminality with nature is articulated by Turner:

> Since liminality represents what Erving Goffman would call a 'leveling and stripping' of structural status, an important component of the liminal situation is...an enhanced stress on 'nature' at the expense of culture. Not only does it represent a situation of instruction...but it is also replete with symbols quite explicitly relating to biological processes, human and non-human, and to other aspects of the natural order. In a sense, when man ceases to be the master and becomes the equal or fellow of man, he also ceases to be the master and becomes the equal or fellow of non-human beings.[3]

1. Turner, *Ritual Process*, p. 95.
2. Turner, *Ritual Process*, pp. 108-13.
3. V. Turner, 'Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communities', *Worship* 46 (1972), p. 410; as quoted by Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 34.

Based on this analysis, Pelton argues quite effectively that, where animal imagery is used of tricksters, it is essential to their structure and is, indeed, a source of their transforming power, for the liminal state is the source of personal and social regeneration.[1]

The fascinating but difficult question we must address here is whether the female imagery in Proverbs serves the same function as the theriomorphism in the typical trickster pattern. Ortner's provocative theoretical analysis of female subordination based on women's association with nature would certainly point in that direction. How such a theoretical generalization might work itself out in Israel and, specifically, in the book of Proverbs, remains to be seen.

Although one may well debate Ortner's conclusion that women's perceived 'closeness' to nature is *the* fundamental cause of female subordination, it is certainly the case that in ancient Israel, as in virtually all known societies, women were subordinate. The question, then, becomes whether this 'less-than-male' status has a hermeneutical function in Proverbs similar to the trickster's liminal animality. I would suggest that it does and that this function finds its focus in the poems' representation of woman as the source of both power and love. Such a representation is 'anti-structure' at its most apparent. Typically, in Israel, the source of power and love would have been Yahweh, usually imaged as male, mediated through the male power-structure of society. The depiction of a woman in these roles is, then, the antithesis not only of the normal social order but of the normal theological order as well. Woman's role itself is transformed in Proverbs: she is the source of the community's life not in the usual biological sense of child-bearer ('nature'), but in the socio-cultural and religious domains.

Although a liminal entity or state represents 'anti-structure' in Turner's conceptualization, this anti-structure is understood by society to reveal its deeper identity and serve as a regenerating force. Turner cites studies by anthropologist M. Fortes, suggesting that,

1. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 34-35.

> where patrilineality is the basis of social structure, an individual's link to other members of society through the mother, and hence by extension and abstraction 'women' and 'femininity', tends to symbolize that wider community and its ethical system that encompasses and pervades the politico-legal system.[1]

I have argued elsewhere that personified Wisdom and the Strange Woman in the post-exilic period seem to embody just such a dynamic.[2] At a time when the center of male power, the monarchy, has been eradicated, the kind of power born of the love and nurture of the woman-centered family household recalls Israel to its fundamental values and serves as the life- and identity-source for the community.

A second dimension of liminality evident in the trickster is that of his movement and mediation between the world of the sacred and that of daily life. Liminality is not a static position, but a passageway between one condition and another, a process that transforms one state into a new one. The trickster is, at one and the same time, non-human, human, and beyond-the-human.

> [A]s the master of all language, he is...the meeting place of all worlds. If, then, he is the image of the ironically imaginative mind of man, he is equally the image of the adaptability of transcendence, for which no material thing is too trivial to become a hierophany, not even that little gust of tongue-shaped breath known as the human word.[3]

In all of Israel's religious literature, it is the wisdom tradition that most clearly discloses such a meeting place of the divine and the human. Here, the sacred is not set apart in the holy of holies, or reserved for the chosen few prophets. Woman Wisdom, who embodies both human wisdom and divine authority in an unexpected female form, stands in the public places, calling to and delighting in all בני אדם. J. Williams has argued that woman and the feminine in Israelite tradition often symbolize the boundary-dwelling of Israel and its God.[4] Female imagery for Wisdom, then, reinforces this paradoxically liminal dimension of the

1. Turner, *Ritual Process*, p. 117.
2. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, pp. 261-81.
3. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 269.
4. Williams, *Women Recounted*, pp. 127-30; *passim*.

tradition that yet exists in the midst of things. There is indeed a sense in which the wisdom tradition is, as its scholarly denigrators have long argued, set apart from 'mainstream Yahwism'. What the trickster paradigm makes clear is that Yahwism could not long exist without it.

Conclusion and Feminist Reflections

In the foregoing discussion, I have employed the trickster pattern well known in world mythology as a hermeneutical resource for analyzing the female imagery in Proverbs. Although I doubt that a folklorist or a biblical scholar would conclusively agree that this double female figure is in fact a true trickster, I have argued that the abundant points of connection afford the trickster paradigm some interpretive value with respect to personified Wisdom and the Strange Woman. To generalize, we might say that reading Proverbs 1–9 through the lens of the trickster produces a form of deconstructive reading of the text, undercutting its most obvious message of absolute opposition between good and evil as represented in these two figures, and highlighting their paradoxical, but experientially validated, unity.

From the perspective of feminist critique and theology, this paradox persists. In Proverbs, we are met first by a strong, exalted, almost deified female figure in personified Wisdom, surely the apex of biblical female imagery. On the other hand, we confront her opposite, the Strange Woman, and begin to fear that, once again, images of women are being used by men to support their own place of power in the social structure and the view of reality that supports it. The trickster paradigm opens yet a third possibility: a positive valuation of women's power as anti-structural, regenerative because of its liminality. But again we face paradox: what structures are being regenerated by this liminality? Is it all too convenient for the patriarchal power structure to give liminality its due in order to draw on its power for themselves?

The reality is that all of these various forces are at work in the mix of human life, which is one reason why feminists may choose different, but equally valid, courses of resistance to the

patriarchal system. Some choose to separate themselves, to live on the margins of patriarchy. This is fine, as long as it is recognized that, by removing liminality from the center of the world, one abdicates the power to transform the world. But perhaps a new world is possible. Others choose to work within the system. This again is a valid choice, but only paradoxically so: the power that might transform the world also helps to support its present form. But perhaps the gain will outweigh the loss.

In either case, I think that the energy for change will come in women's seizing the paradox of our existence, drawing on the power of our liminality for ourselves, reading the Bible as tricksters ourselves. In the spirit of reading like a trickster, let me offer a reflection on one of the Bible's most misogynist comments:

> From woman is the beginning of sin
> and because of her all die (Sir. 25.24).

What would happen if ironic women were daring enough to embrace rather than reject this statement? If we said, yes, human reality includes evil and death, and woman encompasses them, just as she encompasses goodness and life? Woman does indeed represent *all* of human reality. Could we then say, truly, that 'womankind' is the most generic designation possible for the human race?

THE STRANGE WOMAN (אשה זרה/נכריה) OF PROVERBS 1–9 AND POST-EXILIC JUDAEAN SOCIETY*

Harold C. Washington

Introduction

Two female figures stand out in the Instruction of Proverbs 1–9: (1) Woman Wisdom, a divine personification whose moral, intellectual, and erotic appeal allures the (ostensibly male) student into pursuit of her (1.20-33; 3.13-18; 4.5-13, 8.1-31; 9.1-6), and (2) the 'Strange Woman' (אשה זרה) or 'Foreign Woman' (נכריה), the negative antitype of Wisdom, against whom the young man is warned in lurid terms (2.16-19; 5.1-23; 6.24-35; 7.5-27; cf. also 9.13-18). The following passage, with its double entendre in reference to the woman's 'feet', illustrates the sages' attitude toward the Strange Woman:

> For the lips of a Strange Woman drip honey,
> and her speech is smoother than oil;
> but in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
> sharp as a two-edged sword.
> Her 'feet' go down to death;
> her steps follow the path to Sheol (Prov. 5.3-5).[1]

* First published in T.C. Eskenazi and K.H. Richards (eds.), *Second Temple Studies 2: Temple and Community in the Persian Period* (JSOTSup, 175; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), pp. 217-42.

1. Cf. L.G. Perdue's translation of v. 5:

> Her sexual organs descend upon Mot,
> Her aroused vagina embraces Sheol

(*Wisdom and Cult: A Critical Analysis of the Views of Cult in the Wisdom Literature of Israel and the Ancient Near East* [SBLDS, 30; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977], p. 148). The use in biblical Hebrew of רגלים, 'feet', as a veiled reference to the genitals is well known (Exod. 4.25; Deut. 11.10; 25.9; 28.57; Judg. 3.24; Ruth 3.4, 7, 8, 14; 2 Kgs 18.27 *Qere*; Isa.

Several recent studies have illumined the symbolic and ideological significance of the אשה זרה/נכריה in Proverbs. G. Yee, for example, demonstrates that the Strange Woman passages are arranged as a negative foil to Woman Wisdom, highlighting the virtues of the latter by displaying the vices of the Strange Woman in a parallel literary structure.[1] C. Newsom shows that the exploitation of sexual difference in Proverbs 1–9 solidifies the androcentric terms of sapiential discourse: 'Invoking the strange woman as a threat provides a basis for solidarity between father and son'.[2] For C. Camp, who emphasizes the multivalence of the figure as a symbol of chaos threatening the established social, economic, religious and moral orders, the Strange Woman 'is an archetype of disorder at all levels of existence'.[3]

Each of these studies advances our understanding of the Strange Woman as a function of the patriarchal need to control female sexuality. For the sage of Proverbs 1–9, any woman who wields her sexual powers outside the male-governed arrangements of marriage and family is construed as fundamentally Strange. Proverbs 1–9, moreover, magnifies the זרה from a

6.2; 7.20; Jer. 2.25; Ezek. 16.25; for most of these, see *HALAT* [3rd edn], IV, p. 1106). Perdue's translation of צעדיה in v. 5b, based on the parallel with רגליה in v. 5a and an apparent meaning of Ugaritic *ṣgd*, 'to make an erection' (J. Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der ugaritische Sprache* [Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1963] #2339; cf. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, p. 233) is less convincing, but the sexually suggestive quality of the language of Prov. 5.3-5 is nonetheless quite clear. A similar use of רגלים appears in Prov. 7.11: 'Her "feet" do not stay at home'; and 6.28-29: 'Can one walk on hot coals without scorching the "feet"? So is he who sleeps with his neighbor's wife.' Note also in the latter context a play on the words אש, 'fire' (v. 27), and אשה, 'woman' (vv. 26, 29).

1. G.A. Yee, '"I Have Perfumed my Bed with Myrrh": The Foreign Woman (*ʾiššâ zārâ*) in Proverbs 1–9'.

2. C.A. Newsom, 'Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9', in P.L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), p. 149.

3. C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Bible and Literature, 11; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), p. 199, cf. pp. 112-20, 265-71.

mundane temptress with deadly erotic force into a symbol of primordial Evil. This articulation of death and evil in feminine language has grave consequences for the biblical tradition. As C. Camp puts it in a more recent study of the זרה figure, Proverbs portrays 'a force defined here as female that will ultimately split the religious cosmos of Judaism and Christianity into a dualistic moral system in which women can come out on only one side'.[1] We might ask whether the presentation of Woman Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9 is in fact as affirmative as it is usually considered to be. Or are the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom simply two sides of an ancient *meretrix/madonna* (prostitute/virgin) complex: two female figures of male fantasy, each highly charged erotically, but standing in tension with one another, one accessible but dangerous, the other remote and ethereal, both functioning ideologically to alienate the (presumed male) reader from the humanity of real women?[2]

With these broader interpretative issues in view, my aim in the present study is to narrow the focus to the most concrete facet of the gender politics of the Strange Woman: the economic. I propose to describe the particular social and economic interests that originally motivated the polemic against the Strange Woman in Proverbs 1–9. My contention is that during the early post-exilic period, when chs. 1–9 were fashioned as an introduction to the book of Proverbs,[3] the אשה זרה/נכריה represented women who did not belong to the גולה community. Liaisons between Judaean men and these 'foreign' women posed eco

1. 'What's So Strange about the Strange Woman?', in D. Jobling, P.L. Day and G.T. Sheppard (eds.), *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), p. 31.

2. The female reader of Prov. 1–9 confronts a more profound alienation—she is effectively banned from the pursuit of Wisdom by the categories of sapiential rhetoric. See Yee's concluding comments, 'The Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9', pp. 125-27 in this volume; and Newsom, 'Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom.'

3. Elsewhere I have examined the linguistic, structural and thematic evidence for dating the book of Proverbs and have concluded that the book must have been complete before the end of the Persian period,

nomic problems: since genealogical lineage, land tenure and cultic membership were linked in the post-exilic period, the prospect of exogamous marriages brought the danger of outside encroachment upon the land holdings of the Judaean

probably early in that era (*Wealth and Poverty in the Instruction of Amenemope and the Hebrew Proverbs: A Comparative Case-Study in the Social Location and Function of Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature* [SBLDS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, forthcoming]; see ch. 6, 'Dating the Composition and Redaction of the Book of Proverbs'). It is not possible to review that entire discussion here, but some comments are necessary. Recent studies have reached a consensus that the final formation of Proverbs took place during the Persian period (cf. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, pp. 233-39). A. Wolters, however, argued convincingly that the G participle צופיה in Prov. 31.27 is an allusion to the Greek term σοφία ('*Ṣôpiyyâ* [Prov. 31.27] as Hymnic Participle and Play on Sophia', *JBL* 104 [1985], pp. 577-87; cf. G. Rendsburg, 'Bilingual Wordplay in the Bible,' *VT* 38 [1988], p. 354), leading some scholars to move their judgment of the date of composition to a later period, since Greek influence would seem to indicate that the book of Proverbs was still in formation after the conquest of Alexander the Great (e.g. R.C. Van Leeuwen, *Context and Meaning in Prov. 25–27* [SBLDS, 96; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988], p. 143; and Camp, 'What's So Strange about the Strange Woman?', p. 303). This conclusion does not necessarily follow, however. Wolters himself allows that an earlier date, before Alexander, is possible ('*Ṣôpiyyâ* [Prov. 31.27] as Hymnic Participle and Play on Sophia', p. 586 n. 44).

During the two centuries before Alexander's invasion in 332 BCE, there was a heavy influx of Greek cultural influence, brought by trade, Greek settlements on the coast, and the presence of Greek soldiers in the Persian imperial army (M. Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* [London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 1987], pp. 42-54; D. Auscher, 'Les relations entre la Grèce et la Palestine avant la conquête d'Alexandre,' *VT* 17 [1967], pp. 8-30. For the extent of imported Greek pottery during the period, see E. Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period, 538–332 BCE* [Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1982], pp. 137-42, 283-86; and R. Wenning, 'Attische Keramik in Palästina. Ein Zwischenbericht,' *Transeuphratène* 2 [1990], p. 157-168. Also of value is J. Elayi, *Pénétration grecque en Phénicie sous l'Empire perse* [Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1988]). Greek coins appear in the vicinity of Jerusalem well before the beginning of the Hellenistic period proper. The earliest was minted in Athens by Pisistratus, c. 550 BCE (Y. Meshorer, 'An Attic Coin from Jerusalem,' *'Atiqot* 3 [1961], p. 185). The spread of Greek names among the Semitic populations of

congregation. Thus the Strange Woman was off-limits to Judaean men of the Persian period not only for moral and religious reasons: the אשה זרה represented a threat to the social and economic integrity of the post-exilic Judaean collective.[1] The material applied to the Strange Woman in Proverbs 1–9 is not unitary in origin. Rather, traditional warnings against diverse types of illicit women have been gathered in service of the polemic against the זרה. The effect of this redactional combination is to obscure the identity of the זרה, apart from the essential feature of her alien status. The economic anxiety provoked by this alien figure thus motivates an assortment of slurs, sexual and religious, against her.

The Origins of the Strange Woman Motif

First it must be recognized that warnings against strange women are not new to Hebrew wisdom literature. The Instruction texts of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia are intrinsically androcentric, set in the form of a father's teaching to his son, so warnings against women, especially unfamiliar women, are as old as the genre. Typically in these earlier traditions the strange woman appears as a prostitute. Since women were chiefly excluded from the public sphere in ancient Near Eastern societies, one of the few socially sanctioned female roles outside the

pre-Hellenistic Palestine reflects the advance of the Greek language before 332 BCE (M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974], I, p. 61; II, p. 44). Likewise the Samaritan papyri discovered at Wadi Daliyeh attest to the penetration of Hellenistic culture deep into northern Palestine before Alexander's arrival (the papyri are not published, but see the introductory description of F.M. Cross, Jr, 'The Discovery of the Samaria Papyri', *BA* 26 [1963], pp. 110-21). Since Proverbs contains only this single Hebrew–Greek wordplay, but shows no thematic interaction with Greek ideas, we should conceive of an author with some knowledge of the Greek language, but only the remotest sense of Greek culture. This fits best with the Achaemenid era.

1. This paper was written before I had access to J. Blenkinsopp, 'The Social Context of the "Outsider Woman" in Proverbs 1–9', *Bib* 72 (1991), pp. 457-73, but it is worth noting that Blenkinsopp's thesis has much in common with the view presented here.

patriarchal household was that of the prostitute. If a woman in public view was not patently accountable to a man, she was liable to be presumed a prostitute.[1] Thus the New Kingdom Egyptian Instruction of Any warns against unfamiliar women as follows:

> Beware of a woman who is a stranger,
> One not known in her town;
> Don't stare at her when she goes by,
> Do not know her carnally.[2]

The ancient Egyptian scribal miscellanies frequently chide young male students for spending their energies on (as the Egyptians would put it), 'beer, women and dance'.[3] Similar passages can be found in the Mesopotamian Instruction literature (e.g. in the Babylonian 'Counsels of Wisdom', ll. 72-79).[4] In all of this material the woman is viewed as enticing but disreputable. For teacher and pupil alike, she is a distraction from study and should be avoided.

Among the various sub-collections of Proverbs 10–31, only three sayings invoke the warning against women that becomes

1. P. Bird describes the prostitute's marginal status as the consequence of men's conflicting claims both to exclusive control of their wives' sexuality and sexual access to other women: 'Her social status is that of an outcast, though not an outlaw, a tolerated, but dishonored member of society...The harlot is that "other" woman, tolerated but stigmatized, desired but ostracized' ('The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts', *Semeia* 46 [1989], pp. 120-21; cf. S. Niditch, 'The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Gen. 38', *HTR* 72 [1979], p. 147).

2. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. II. *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 137. For additional examples, see H. Brunner, *Altägyptische Weisheit: Lehren für das Leben* (Bibliothek der alten Welt, Reihe der alte Orient; Zürich: Artemis, 1988), p. 463.

3. E.g. Pap. Anastasi IV.11,9–12,1, 'Rebuke Addressed to a Dissipated Scribe' (= Pap. Sallier I.9,9ff; cf. Pap. Anastasi V,1b,1-2); in R.A. Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies* (Brown Egyptological Studies, 1; London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 182.

4. W. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), pp. 102-103.

a leitmotif in Proverbs 1–9. Prov. 29.3 establishes an opposition between wisdom (חכמה), and illicit women (זונות, prostitutes):

> The lover of wisdom gladdens his father,
> but the associator with prostitutes wastes his wealth.

Here, however, there is no identification of the woman as strange (זרה) or foreign (נכריה). Two sentences present the figure of the strange woman as a treacherous watery pit (also known already from the Egyptian Instruction of Any):[1]

> The speech of strange women (זרות) is a deep pit;
> The curse of Yhwh is on him who falls into it (22.14).
> For a strange woman[2] is a deep pit;
> and a foreign woman (נכריה:) a narrow well (23.27).

These sentences are likely to be of pre-exilic origin, and thus it would seem that the warning against unfamiliar women was already a traditional theme for the post-exilic sages. This does not, however, account for the singular intensity of the concern in Proverbs 1–9. Only in Proverbs 1–9 does זרה/נכריה become the technical terminology for a type of woman who endangers the very community. How are we to identify this female figure who inspires such alarm?

The Problem of the Identity of the זרה *in Proverbs 1–9*

No consensus has been established concerning the identity of the אשה זרה/נכריה in Proverbs 1–9. Earlier debate revolved around the question whether the זרה is an allegorical or actual figure. The Strange Woman was interpreted either as a personification, opposed to Wisdom but with no mundane referent, or as the literal representation of a real type of woman. Literalists favored the view that the זרה represents Greek ἑταίραι, common prostitutes brought into the region by the armies of Alexander

1. Any describes the woman as 'a deep water whose course is unknown' (Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, II, p. 137).

2. Reading זרה (cf. LXX ἀλλότριος οἶκος), but MT here reads זונה. One could argue in favor of MT as the *lectio difficilior*, since the LXX is likely to have conformed to the tendency of the adjectives זרה and נכריה to occur as a pair in Prov. 1–9 (2.16; 5.20; 7.5; cf. L.A. Snijders, 'The Meaning of זר in the Old Testament', *OTS* 10 [1954], p. 67).

and his successors.[1] Neither of these alternatives proved adequate. Commentators dropped the allegorical line of inquiry as anachronistic and focused on efforts to identify the historical and cultural setting of the figure. Much credence has been given to G. Boström's proposal that the זרה is a not an ordinary prostitute, but a foreign devotee of the goddess Ishtar who engages in cultic prostitution as a fertility rite.[2] Boström's theory rests solely, however, on details from Prov. 7.5-27, where references to sacrifices, paying of vows (7.14), lunar phases (7.9, 20), and the distinctive behavior of the woman might seem to imply a cultic background. The hypothesis cannot be applied to Prov. 2.16-19, 5.1-23, 6.24-35 and 9.13-18, which lack the features that led Boström to associate the hrz with a foreign cult.[3]

Recent studies, moreover, have raised doubts about the existence of cultic prostitution in ancient Israel and its environs. R. Oden, for example, argues that the Deuteronomistic charge of 'sacred prostitution' is an example of what some anthropologists have defined as 'ethnic boundary marking'.[4] This is a process by which an ethnic group develops sensational accounts, often erroneous, of the customs of other groups as a way of delineating its own self-understanding. Sexual and dietary practices are the most common subjects for ethnic boundary marking. Oden maintains that if we prescind from the biblical suggestions of cultic prostitution, no clear evidence remains for the practice in the ancient Near East. Most of the evidence for cultic prostitution from ancient Mesopotamia, for example, is

1. For a review of earlier research, c. 1894–1929, see G. Boström, *Proverbiastudien: Die Weisheit und das fremde Weib* (Lund: Gleerup, 1935), pp. 15-41.

2. Boström, *Proverbiastudien*, pp. 103-34.

3. W. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 284-85. McKane also gives an incisive critique of Boström's treatment of Prov. 7.5-27; see pp. 334-39.

4. R.A. Oden, 'Religious Identity and the Sacred Prostitution Accusation', in *The Bible without Theology: The Theological Tradition and Alternatives to it* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), pp. 131-53. Oden draws on the discussion of anthropologist F. Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969); see especially Barth's 'Introduction', pp. 9-38.

irredeemably vague. The variety of Akkadian terms which have been interpreted as designations for cultic prostitutes (e.g. *ēntu, nadītu, qadištu*) simply denote female cultic functionaries—there is little basis in the texts for assuming that these individuals are prostitutes. It appears that celibacy rather than compulsory sexual intercourse was a condition of the status of *ēntu* and *nadītu*[1] Virtually all the post-biblical evidence for cultic prostitution, Oden argues, is dependent upon Herodotus's account of rites at the Babylonian temple of Ishtar (*Histories* 1.199), which is not reliable as historical evidence.[2] Herodotus's colorful stories, I would suggest, are themselves probably examples of ethnic boundary marking, delineating the virtues of the Greek world by describing the exotic practices (from the Greek perspective) of the distant East.

The biblical texts which have generally been regarded as witnesses to the practice of cultic prostitution (Hos. 1–3, 4.13-14; Amos 2.7; Deut. 23.18-19; 1 Kgs 14.24; 2 Kgs 23.7 etc.) are equally uncompelling. P. Bird has recently shown, for example, that the root זנה in Hosea has no intrinsic cultic connotations; the religious indictment of זנונים in Hosea 1–4 is a metaphorical and polemical innovation of the prophet.[3] K. van der Toorn concludes in a recent study that '"sacred prostitution" as a magical rite in the context of fertility cults...is a myth of historiography in the case of ancient Israel'.[4] If we accept this conclusion,

1. Oden, 'Religious Identity and the Sacred Prostitution Accusation', pp. 148-52.

2. Oden, 'Religious Identity and the Sacred Prostitution Accusation', pp. 146-47. For recent surveys of opinion on the historical reliability of Herodotus, see S. Flory, *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1987), p. 170; and H.R. Immerwahr, 'Herodotus', in P.E. Easterling and B.M.W. Knox (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*. I, Part 3. *Philosophy, History, Oratory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 26-29 (each with additional bibliography).

3. P. Bird, '"To Play the Harlot": An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor', in P.L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), pp. 75-94.

4. K. van der Toorn, 'Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel', *JBL* 108 (1989), p. 205. Because of their association in some biblical contexts with the root זנה, the substantives קדשה and קדש have been misconstrued as designations for cultic prostitutes. It can be

Boström's interpretation of the אשה זרה/נכריה must be rejected.

Van der Toorn offers an alternate scenario for Prov. 7.5-27: far from being a professional prostitute, the woman is engaged in an extraordinary act of prostitution for the sake of paying a vow. For ancient Israelite women living in the margin of the official cultus, van der Toorn argues, the vow was a popular form of devotion. Women were typically dependent upon men, however, to supply the means of payment.[1] If a husband or father refused, one of the few means of access to resources outside the household economy was incidental prostitution. Thus the woman of Prov. 7.5-27 says that she is obliged to pay a vow (7.14, the D perfect שלמתי has a modal sense: 'today *I must fulfil* my vows'), and in the absence of her husband, who has taken the money bag with him (7.19-20), she invites a young man to exchange money for sex.[2] Van der Toorn's reading of the passage is instructive, but there is reason to question whether women were so relegated to the fringe of the Israelite cultus.[3] The combination of piety and unabashed adultery envisioned in this scenario also strains credibility.[4] Whatever its merits, van

asserted with confidence, however, only that the terms denote consecrated individuals. See van der Toorn, 'Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows', p. 203; Bird, '"To Play the Harlot"', pp. 86-88; and M.I. Gruber, 'The *qādēš* in the Book of Kings and in Other Sources', *Tarbiz* 52 (1983), pp. 167-76 (Hebrew).

1. This would naturally have been a source of tension between husband and wife. Van der Toorn ('Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows', p. 196) adduces cross-cultural evidence from contemporary Islamic societies: A.H. Betteridge, 'The Controversial Vows of Urban Muslim Women', in N.A. Falk and R.M. Cross (eds.), *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 141-55.

2. Van der Toorn, 'Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows', pp. 193-201.

3. See P. Bird, 'The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus', in P.D. Miller, Jr, P.D. Hanson and S.D. McBride (eds.), *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 397-419.

4. Cf. C. Camp: 'The scenario of a proper Israelite matron picking up some pocket change with a little harlotry on the side seems improbable' ('What's So Strange about the Strange Woman?', p. 21).

der Toorn's reading of Prov. 7.5-27, like Boström's cultic prostitution theory, cannot be applied to the larger complex of Strange Woman passages in Proverbs 1–9. None of the distinctive particulars of the scene in 7.5-27 appear outside this passage.

Above all it must be recognized that prostitution, whether cultic or mundane, is neither the sole nor central concern of the Strange Woman passages as a group. Although Prov. 7.5-27 compares the forbidden woman to a prostitute—she is 'dressed like' one (שׁית זונה, 7.10)—never in Proverbs 1-9 is the אשׁה זרה/נכריה explicitly identified as a prostitute. Prov. 6.26 *contrasts* the forbidden woman (נכריה, 6.24) to a זונה:

> For a prostitute (אשׁה זונה) may be had for a loaf of bread,
> But the wife of a man (אשׁת איש) stalks a man's life.

The immediate concern in this context is adultery not prostitution, as 6.32 makes clear:

> But he who commits adultery has no sense;
> he who does it destroys himself.

It is likewise impossible, however, to interpret all the Strange Woman passages in Proverbs 1–9 as prohibitions of adultery. P. Humbert suggests that the expressions אשׁה זרה and נכריה denote a woman who is 'strange' because she belongs to another man (i.e. she is 'alien' in a forensic sense). He translates the terms זרה and נכריה as 'femme d'autrui' or 'femme autre (que la sienne)', and refers them to adultery.[1] Not all of the material in Proverbs 1–9 allows this explanation, however. Two of the Strange Woman passages indicate that the זרה is married (6.29; 7.19), but the others do not.[2] Neither the expression אשׁה זרה nor נכריה occurs

1. P. Humbert, 'La "femme étrangère" du livre des Proverbes', *Revue des études sémitiques* 2 (1937), pp. 49-64; 'Les adjectifs "*zâr*" et "*nokrî*" et la "femme étrangère" des Proverbes biblique', in *Mélanges syriens offerts à M. René Dussaud*, I (Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique, 30; Paris: Librarie Orientalisk Paul Geuthner, 1939), pp. 259-66.

2. The term אלוף in 2.17 might be taken in the sense of 'friend, companion', and thus 'husband', but an equally convincing argument can be made for referring the term to Yhwh. Other evidence suggests a meaning of 'teacher' or 'instruction' for the word here (McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, pp. 286-87). For the semantic development

outside Proverbs with the meaning that Humbert would assign to them here: 'belonging (i.e. married) to another'. The terminology of biblical Hebrew for a woman with whom a man commits adultery is unambiguous: אשת רעהו, 'the wife of one's neighbor' (Lev. 20.10; Deut. 22.24; Jer. 5.8; Ezek. 18.6, 11, 15; 22.11; 33.26; cf. אשת רעך, 'the wife of your neighbor', Exod. 20.17; Deut. 5.21; אשת עמיתך, 'the wife of your kinsman', Lev. 18.20); אשת איש, 'the wife of a man' (Lev. 20.10); נאפת, 'adulterer' (G participle feminine, Lev. 20.10; Ezek. 16.38; 23.45); מנאפת, 'adulterer' (D participle feminine, Ezek. 16.32; Hos. 3.1; Prov. 30.20). In Proverbs 1–9 such designations for a woman involved in adultery appear only in Prov. 6.24-35 (אשת איש, 6.26; אשת רעהו, 6.29; the man is designated נאף אשה, 'one who commits adultery with a woman', 6.32). There is no basis for assuming that the terms זרה/נכריה denote an adulterous woman in the other Strange Woman texts. Nowhere in these passages are the penalties for adultery alluded to (Lev. 20.10; Deut. 22.22); rather the sanctions that are invoked (Prov. 5.14) deal with other offenses, as we shall see below.

The richness of detail concerning the Strange Woman in Proverbs 1–9 only vexes attempts to identify her. The descriptions of 2.16-19, 5.1-23, 6.24-35, 7.5-27 and 9.13-18 differ so greatly among themselves that despite the efforts of some commentators, it is impossible to reconcile them.[1] No actual woman would possess all the traits assigned to the זרה. She is instead a subtly crafted composite literary figure, 'a rather motley character', as L. Perdue characterizes her, whose 'fusing of different types seems most comparable to a similar blending together of the same types in the prophetic literature where they are again lumped together in an indistinguishable maze'.[2] These

of the verbal root אלף in the sense associated with instruction, see M.D. Coogan '*'lp*, "To be an Abecedarian"', *JAOS* 110 (1990), p. 322.

1. The description of the אשת כסילות in 9.13-18 might be excluded from the group, since the terms זרה and נכריה are absent from this passage. G. Yee's study, however, has shown that a strategic arrangement groups the five passages, including 9.13-18, chiastically in opposition to the figure of Wisdom ('The Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9'). Thus, by editorial design if not in original composition, the אשת כסילות belongs to the same complex as the other accounts of the אשה זרה and נכריה.

2. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, p. 154; cf. O. Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos*

tensions in the portrayal of the אשה זרה/נכריה most likely reflect the independent origins of some of the passages now referred to her. Drawing upon the traditional motif of the warning against unfamiliar women, the sages have constructed their polemic against the Strange Woman by combining originally independent units in a redactional process parallel to that through which a composite portrait of divine Wisdom was assembled in Proverbs 1–9, relying in part upon older units of tradition.[1]

Three of the Strange Woman passages are introduced by strikingly similar formulaic bi-colons:

להצילך מאשה זרה מנכריה אמריה החליקה
To save you from the strange woman
from the foreign woman with her smooth words (2.16).

לשמרך מאשת רע מחלקת לשון נכריה
To preserve you from the evil woman,
from the smooth tongue of the foreign woman (6.24).

לשמרך מאשה זרה מנכריה אמריה החליקה
To preserve you from the strange woman,
from the foreign woman with her smooth words (7.5).

The references to the woman's seductive words mark these introductory lines as part of the editorial framework of Proverbs 1–9, which structurally opposes the treacherous speech of the Strange Woman to the salutary words of Woman Wisdom.[2] Apart from these formulaic introductory lines, the extended accounts of Prov. 6.24-35 and 7.5-27 make no mention of the woman as זרה or נכריה, and, as we have seen, their pictures of the figure are quite divergent. This is easily explained if the editors of Proverbs 1–9 have appropriated independent traditions for

(BKAT, 17; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), pp. 79, 82; and Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, pp. 115-17.

1. Prov. 8.1-36, for example, has ancient roots and some portions of the text may have been composed as early as the period of the united monarchy (see C. Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9: Eine form- und motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter Einbeziehung Ägyptischen Vergleichsmaterials* [WMANT, 22; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966], pp. 76-118; cf. p. 13).

2. J.-N. Aletti, 'Séduction et parole en Proverbes I-IX', *VT* 27 (1977), pp. 129-44; G. Yee, 'The Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1-9'.

the purposes of their campaign against the זרה. Before their incorporation into Proverbs 1–9 these compositions warned against involvement with particular types of women: Prov. 6.25-35 focused on adultery, while 7.6-27 addressed a special circumstance tantamount to prostitution. In their present context, the traditions are adapted for the purpose of denouncing the זרה.[1]

Proverbs 1–9 thus gathers under the umbrella of the זרה an assortment of warnings against unfamiliar women. Because of the composite nature of her portrait, the proscribed figure has no consistent identity, and sexual slur is only the most prominent of a variety of tactics used to disparage her. The woman is depicted as 'alien, harlotrous, evil, adulterous, and foolish'.[2] She is also noisy, deceitful, disrespectful, ignorant and perilous unto death. Why does this figure arouse such attention? The essential attribute unifying the accounts of the forbidden woman in Proverbs 1–9 is her designation as זרה/נכריה; thus to ascertain the sages' motivation for denouncing her we must examine the semantic value of these terms with special reference to the post-exilic period.

In biblical Hebrew the adjective זר denotes 'otherness', referring to what is outside a field of recognition or of legitimacy.[3] In cultic contexts, for example, we find references to 'illicit incense' (קטרת זרה, Exod. 30.9) or 'unlawful fire' (אש זרה, Lev. 10.1). As a social designation, זר refers chiefly to those outside the pertinent kinship group, whether family, tribe or nation. Thus the law of levirate marriage stipulates that 'the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside (the family) to a stranger' (לאיש זר, Deut. 25.5). Priestly rules designate men of non-Aaronic descent (e.g. Num. 3.10), or those outside the tribe of Levi (Num. 1.51; 18.4) as זר. Frequently in the prophetic literature the term זר

1. Other commentators have suggested composite origins for chs. 6 and 7. Cf. for example Boström, *Proverbiastudien*, pp. 143-44; R.N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9* (SBT; Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1965), pp. 48-50.

2. Yee, 'The Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9'.

3. Snijders reviews all occurences of the term in 'The Meaning of זר in the Old Testament', pp. 1-154; cf. Snijders, 'זור/זר', *TDOT*, IV, pp. 52-58; for נכרי, cf. 'The Meaning of זר in the Old Testament', pp. 60-68.

denotes non-Israelites (as such, usually Israel's enemies), for example, Ezek. 31.12: 'foreigners from the most terrible of nations', זרים עריצי גוים.

The adjective נכרי has a similar range of meanings to those of זר. The term can indicate 'strangeness' simply with regard to the household (Ps. 69.9), but as a social designation נכרי typically denotes foreignness by reason of nationality or ethnicity (e.g. Exod. 21.8; Deut. 17.15; 29.21; Judg. 19.12; 1 Kgs 8.41 = 2 Chron. 6.33). In exilic and post-exilic contexts the word-pair זר/נכרי becomes prominent, especially in the prophetic literature where it designates the foreign opponents of Judah (Obad. 11; Isa. 61.5; Jer. 5.19; cf. Lam. 5.2). The frequent collocation in Proverbs 1–9 of זרה with נכריה suggests that here too the terminology denotes a 'foreign' adversary of the Judean community. Most significant for comparison with Proverbs 1–9 are Ezra 10.2, 10-11, 14, 17-18, 44; and Neh. 13.26-27 where the phrase נשים נכריות, 'foreign women' (cf. also 1 Kgs 11.1, 8), refers to women outside the גולה group whom men within the community had married. The original context of Proverbs' disparagement of the זרה/נכריה, I will now argue, was this circumstance of Ezra's and later Nehemiah's drive to free the post-exilic community 'of everything foreign' (מכל נכר, Neh. 13.30). The polemic against the אשה זרה/נכריה in Proverbs 1–9 corresponds in terminology and in substance to the post-exilic campaign against exogamous marriages described in Ezra 9–10; Neh. 10.30, 13.23-27; and Mal. 2.10-16.[1]

1. A connection between the polemic against the Strange Woman in Prov. 1–9 and the marriage reforms of Ezra–Nehemiah was first suggested, to my knowledge, by H. Oort, who argued that Prov. 1–9 reflects conditions later in the post-exilic era, when the measures instituted by Ezra and Nehemiah had lost force ('Spreuken 1–9', *TT* 19 [1885], pp. 412-17). C. Camp suggests that while deviant sexuality was preeminent in the earlier tradition of warnings against strange women, the secondary interpretation of the זרה as ethnically foreign came to the fore in support of the post-exilic marriage reforms (*Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, pp. 269-70; cf. Camp, 'What's So Strange about the Strange Woman?', p. 18).

The Social-Historical Context of the Post-Exilic Campaign against Foreign Women

Conventionally the prohibition of exogamous marriage in post-exilic Judah has been understood as religiously motivated: the aim was to preserve authentic Yahwist observance against the syncretist influences of the 'peoples of the land'. The post-exilic community, however, was not only a religious association. J. Weinberg has advanced the thesis that the Restoration community was organized as a *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* (civic–temple community), a religio-political unit fictively constituted as an agnatic lineage of property-holding men and their families.[1] Membership in the temple community was determined by ostensible descent within a paternal estate (בית אבות; Ezra 1.5; 2.59 = Neh. 7.61; 2.68; 4.2-3; 8.1; 10.16; Neh. 7.70-71; 11.13; 12.12, 22, 23).[2] Real property (נחלה/אחזה, Neh. 11.3, 20) was distributed according to the divisions of this lineage.[3] Thus in the *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* participation in the temple cult, land tenure and citizenship were linked under the leadership of the heads of

1. J.P. Weinberg, 'Demographische Notizen zur Geschichte der nachexilischen Gemeinde in Juda', *Klio* 54 (1972), pp. 45-58; 'Das *bēit ʾabōt* im 6.–4. Jh. v.u.Z.', *VT* 23 (1973), pp. 400-14; 'Der *ʿam hāʾāreṣ* des 6.–4. Jh. v.u.Z.', *Klio* 56 (1974), pp. 325-35; 'Die Agrarverhältnisse in der Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde der Achämenidenzeit', in J. Harmatta and G. Komoróczy (eds.), *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im Alten Vorderasien* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiadö, 1976), pp. 473-86; 'Zentral- und Partikulargewalt im achämenidischen Reich', *Klio* 59 (1976), pp. 24-43; 'Die Mentalität der jerusalemischen Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde des 6.–4. Jh. v.u.Z.', *Transeuphratène* 5 (1992), pp. 133-41. Weinberg's theory is summarized by D.L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 30-31; and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer–Stone, 1989), pp. 106-108. Important criticisms of the *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* model are given by J. Blenkinsopp, 'Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah', in P.R. Davies (ed.), *Second Temple Studies. I. Persian Period* (JSOTSup, 117; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), pp. 22-53.

2. Weinberg, 'Das *bēit ʾabōt* im 6.–4. Jh. v.u.Z.'

3. Weinberg, 'Die Agrarverhältnisse in der Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde der Achämenidenzeit', pp. 481-84.

the paternal estates (ראשי האבות), who presumably were among the larger property holders of the community.[1]

Land tenure was a critical issue for the early post-exilic community. The deportees to Babylon had comprised only a small proportion of the total Judaean population, perhaps 10 per cent.[2] After the deportations, the remaining Judaean majority appears to have made claims to the land holdings left behind by the exiles (cf. 2 Kgs 25.12; Jer. 39.10; 40.4-12).[3] During the exile Ezekiel quotes the assertion of those remaining in Judah that 'the land has been given to us as a possession' (11.15), to which Ezekiel counters vigorously that the land of Israel will be given back to the exiles (11.17; cf. 33.23-29). Thus as members of the hlwg community began to return and re-establish themselves, conflict over the land was inevitable.[4]

The returning exiles responded to local opposition by conceiving themselves typologically as the generation of a new conquest (Ezra 9.1-2, 10-15). The true Israel, now identified with the גולה (Ezra 1.11; 2.1; 9.4; 10.6; Neh. 7.6), had entered the land from the outside, and those presently occupying the land, like the Canaanites during the first conquest, were excluded from the covenant community.[5] The 'children of the גולה' (בני הגולה, Ezra 4.1; 6.19-20; 8.35; 10.7, 16; גלותא בני, Ezra 6.16) were opposed to the

1. Note the prominence of the ראשי האבות in contributing to the rebuilding of the temple and the maintenance of its treasury (Neh. 7.70-71; Ezra 2.68).

2. This is J. Weinberg's estimate ('Demographische Notizen zur Geschichte der nachexilischen Gemeinde in Juda', p. 47); for other reviews of the evidence, see W. Schottroff, 'Zur Sozialgeschichte Israels in der Perserzeit', *VF* 27 (1982), p. 49; and P. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century BC* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 22-23 n. 24.

3. See especially E. Janssen, *Juda in der Exilszeit: Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Entstehung des Judentums* (FRLANT, 69; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), pp. 49-54.

4. Weinberg, 'Die Agrarverhältnisse in der Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde der Achämenidenzeit', pp. 479-81.

5. H.G.M. Williamson, 'The Concept of Israel in Transition', in R.E. Clements (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 155. Perhaps this 'new conquest' ideology reflects the influence of Deutero-Isaiah's conception of the return as a new Exodus.

'peoples of the land' (עמי הארץ, Ezra 10.2, 11; Neh. 9.24; 10.31-32) or 'peoples of the lands' (עמי הארצות, Ezra 3.3; 9.1-2, 11; Neh. 9.30). By referring to the local non-גולה Judaeans as 'peoples of the land(s)', the returning exiles effectively classified their Judaean rivals, together with the neighboring non-Judaean peoples (Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, residents of Samaria, etc.), as alien to Israel.[1] S. Japhet summarizes the situation:

> According to Ezr.–Neh. only one Israelite community exists in the land of Israel: that of returned exiles!...Who, then, are the other inhabitants of the land, according to Ezr.–Neh.? They are all foreigners (נכרים), peoples of the lands (עמי הארצות)...Anyone who does not fall under the definition of Israel according to Ezra's view, that is, anyone who is not a member of the 'community of exile', belongs to the 'peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from end to end' (Ezr. 9.11). The dichotomy is sharp: the 'exiles' are Israel, and all others 'the peoples of the lands'.[2]

The efforts of the returned exiles to regain control of the land were buttressed by Persian endorsement of their control over the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 1.1-4; 6.1-12; 7.12-26). Ezek. 11.15-17 already portrays both the non-deported Judaeans and the exiles acknowledging that legal right to the land accrues to those with access to the cult (cf. Lev. 25.23).[3] Now as the post-exilic Judaean *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* began to take shape under Persian sponsorship, those who established membership in the temple community likewise secured their land rights.[4] Cultic

1. Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra–Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), p. 108.

2. 'People and Land in the Restoration Period,' in G. Strecker (ed.), *Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit* (Göttinger Theologische Arbeiten, 25; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), pp. 112-15.

3. M. Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 1987), pp. 75, 81-82; cf. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, p. 60.

4. Besides the studies of Weinberg cited above, see Blenkinsopp, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, pp. 69, 83. For comparative evidence from Persian period Babylonia, where hereditary citizenship, cultic participation and land tenure were linked, see M. Dandamayev, 'Babylonia in the Persian Age', in W.D. Davies and L. Finkelstein (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. I. *Introduction: The Persian Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 330-31.

membership and the attendant land rights were established genealogically, thus a technical terminology for genealogical registry (ספר היחש, התיחש, Neh. 7.5) first appears in the sources of the early post-exilic period.[1] According to the accounts of Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7, some families were excluded because 'they could not prove their paternal estates (בית אבות) nor their descent, whether they belonged to Israel' (Ezra 2.59-60 = Neh. 7.61-62).

Although the genealogical idiom dominates the accounts of Ezra–Nehemiah, many of the genealogical relations that defined the temple community were fictive expressions of political or social solidarity rather than blood lineage.[2] This is evident in the גולה lists of Ezra 2.1-70//Neh. 7.6-63, where groups identified by patrilineage are combined with those identified by geographical location (e.g. Ezra 2.21-35). The fluidity of the גולה concept is evident in the exclusion of some families who were unmistakably part of the exilic group (note the Babylonian place names of Ezra 2.59), while other local groups who dissociated themselves from the 'peoples of the lands' were eventually admitted to the cultic assembly (Neh. 10.29; Ezra 6.21). The volatility of the definition of the authentic גולה group is also reflected in the case of the family of Hakkoz, which according to Ezra 2.61 was banned, but in Ezra 8.33 seems to have been readmitted (cf. Neh. 3.4, 21; 1 Chron. 24.10). Gradually the word גולה was converted from a term proper to those who underwent exile or their immediate descendants (e.g. Ezra 1.11; 2.1), to a designation for all recognized members of the community (Ezra 6.19-21).[3]

Genealogical reckoning thus provided an 'ideology of descent' for the post-exilic civic–temple community similar to that found in preexilic Israel and in other tribal cultures.[4] The גולה

1. Weinberg, 'Das *bēit 'abōt* im 6.–4. Jh. v.u.Z.', p. 406.
2. See especially Smith, *The Religion of the Landless*, pp. 99-105.
3. R.J. Coggins, 'The Origins of the Jewish Diaspora,' in R. Clements (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 166-67. Weinberg attempts to trace in some detail the progressive incorporation of local Judaean populations into the civic–temple community. See especially 'Demographische Notizen zur Geschichte der nachexilischen Gemeinde in Juda', pp. 53-58.
4. The phrase 'ideology of descent' is from cultural anthropologist

community's ideology of descent, however, differed from that provided by the oral genealogies of tribal cultures because it was subject to the control of writing. Through their administration of the genealogical registry, the leaders of the post-exilic community had the decisive word in the debate over the identity of the true Israel, who would belong to its temple, and who would possess its land. This control which the heads of the paternal estates exercised over community membership and over land allotments among the divisions of the lineage was frustrated, however, by exogamous marriages by some members of the community. Marriage alliances had always had implications for property holdings among the families involved, but the economic stability of the *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* was especially vulnerable to disruption by marriages outside the community.[1] In the voluble social circumstances of the early post-exilic period, any unauthorized disturbance of the genealogical integrity of a בית אבות would have been an economic threat. Exogamous marriages could result in alien claims to land belonging to the Judaean collective.[2]

The post-exilic rules prohibit marriage to either men or women outside the community: 'We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons' (Neh. 10.30 [Heb. 10.31]; cf. 13.25; Ezra 9.12); yet the record of

M. Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice–Hall, 1968), p. 55. Compare the assessment by anthropologist M. Fortes of the segmented oral genealogies of tribal groups: the lineage genealogy is not 'historically accurate', but takes its shape as a 'conceptualization of the existing lineage structure...projected backwards as pseudo-history' ('The Structure of Unilineal Descent Groups', *American Anthropologist* 55 [1953], p. 27).

1. While not adopting Weinberg's *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* model for the post-exilic period, K.G. Hoglund recognizes marriage 'as a means of transferring property and social status from one group to another', and relates the marriage reforms of Ezra–Nehemiah to concern over property rights ('Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah' [PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1989], pp. 436, 451-52); cf. Hoglund, 'The Achaemenid Context', in P.R. Davies (ed.), *Second Temple Studies. I. Persian Period* (JSOTSup, 117; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), p. 67; and Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, p. 242.

2. Cf. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, p. 176.

offenses in Ezra–Nehemiah focuses, like Proverbs 1–9, on women outside the community as the principal danger (Ezra 9.2; 10.2-3, 10-11, 14, 17-18, 44; Neh. 13.23, 26-27). This emphasis in Proverbs 1–9 and Ezra–Nehemiah on avoiding women outside the community addresses a concrete threat to the real property holdings of the Judaean collective, because within the patrilineal land tenure system women were capable of inheriting and disposing of property. For example, Priestly law confirms female inheritance in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad (Num. 27.1-11; 36.1-9). In the absence of a male heir, the provision for these women aims to secure the inheritance within the bounds of its rightful patrilineal tribe, thus female heirs are required to marry within the lineage of their late father (see especially Num. 27.7-8; 36.6-9). These laws, presumably post-exilic in their present form, make clear that it was possible for women to inherit real property, and moreover that this possibility introduced conflicts over land tenure even among Israelite tribes. In the post-exilic setting, if families outside the recognized paternal estates became related to community members through marriage, there could be no assurance that such laws would preserve the economic base of the Judaean collective.

T.C. Eskenazi has recently drawn attention to additional evidence from Elephantine that Jewish women of the Persian period could own land. The archives of Mibtahiah daughter of Mahseiah, for example, attest to a woman who in her lifetime acquired three houses. Through the course of several marriages she was able to buy, sell and inherit property. Another amply documented case is that of a fifth-century Egyptian slave woman named Tamut, who was married to the Jewish temple official Ananiah son of Azariah. Tamut had extensive real property rights, including the ability to bequeath to her daughter Jehoishma even when a male heir existed.[1] The marriage

1. T.C. Eskenazi, 'Out from the Shadows: Biblical Women in the Postexilic Era', *JSOT* 54 (1992), pp. 25-43. For additional details of the archives of Mibtahiah and Tamut, see B. Porten, 'The Jews in Egypt', in W. Davies and L. Finkelstein (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, I, pp. 399-400; and *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 190-263.

contracts from Elephantine leave no doubt that women married to Jewish men of the Persian period could dispose of real property, and might at least partially disinherit the families of their husbands as a result of divorce.[1]

There are further indications of the considerable degree of economic power that women in the Judaean community could possess. At least one בית אבות listed in Ezra 2.1-70//Neh. 7.6-63 descends from a woman (Ezra 2.61; Neh. 7.63; 1 Esdr. 5.38).[2] This group was excluded from the community (Ezra 2.62), but not apparently because it derived from a woman. The group was marginal because of its descent from a Transjordanian family. This capacity within a patrilineal system to recognize segments derived from females is another feature shared by the post-exilic Judaean social organization and the segmentary lineages of genuine tribal cultures.[3] In both contexts the lack of a legitimated patriarch for a lineage segment does not necessarily prejudice against the property rights of the segment within the larger social group.

Several commentators have noted the presence in Ezra–Nehemiah of women at the assembly (קהל) that convenes at crucial moments in the life of the people and appears to constitute the broadest authority of the community.[4] Women belong to the קהל before which Ezra reads the Law (Neh. 8.2-3),

1. See also the study of Elephantine marriage contracts in E. Lipiński, 'Marriage and Divorce in the Judaism of the Persian Period', *Transeuphratène* 4 (1991), pp. 63-71.

2. On the 'descendants of Barzillai, who had married one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name,' see Eskenazi, 'Out from the Shadows', pp. 37-38; Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, p. 260; H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC, 16; Waco, TX: Word, 1985), p. 37.

3. For the inclusion of segments descended from women within patrilineal tribal groups, see Sahlins, *Tribesmen*, p. 55. An example from the Tiv of central Nigeria is illustrated in the genealogical diagram provided by L. Bohanan, 'A Genealogical Charter', *Africa* 22 (1952), p. 302 fig. 1.

4. E.g. Eskenazi, 'Out from the Shadows', pp. 41-42; Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, p. 259. For Deuteronomic antecedents (Deut. 29.10, 17; cf. 31.12; 12.12, 18; 16.11, 14), see M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 291.

and which later takes an oath of allegiance to the Law (Neh. 10.29). Women also attend the assembly that makes a covenant to expel illicit wives and their children from the community (Ezra 10.1). Also significant is Neh. 5.1-13, where women are explicitly mentioned along with the men (v. 1) as crying out for their threatened possessions, 'our fields, our vineyards and our houses' (v. 3). It appears therefore that despite the ostensibly patriarchal social organization of the post-exilic period, women in the community were significantly enfranchised. In order to preserve the collective economic base of land holdings, however, women outside the community were prevented from gaining access by marrying into the group.

It would overdraw the case to maintain that internal management of land tenure was the sole motive for Ezra and Nehemiah's marriage reforms. Religious self-definition must have been an urgent concern for the exiles, and this would have remained an issue in its own right for the post-exilic temple community. Moreover, K. Hoglund has adduced evidence in his study of Achaemenid imperial administration that the Persians, to facilitate ease of identification of the ruling group and regularity of administration and taxation, enforced a guarded ethnic identity among those, such as the גולה community, to whom they entrusted regions of the imperial domain.[1] Hoglund sees in the community's lament of their status as 'people in bondage' (Ezra 9.9) and as 'slaves in the land' (Neh. 9.36) the self-awareness of a dependent population who occupy Judaean territory at the pleasure of the Persians. If Hoglund is correct, the גולה Judaeans risked losing their land entirely if they did not maintain themselves as a distinct community.

Since, for all these reasons, exogamous marriage was perceived as a threat to the survival of the civic–temple community, unprecedented sanctions were imposed against the practice. The received legal tradition, however, did not contain a universal ban of exogamy, nor was there any existing provision for the expulsion of foreign wives. Ezra's citation of the law in 9.1-2 is an exegetical combination of Exod. 34.11-16 and Deut. 7.1-4, each of which contains a stock catalogue of traditional enemies

1. 'Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine', pp. 437-42; 'The Achaemenid Context', pp. 65-66.

of Israel, including 'the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites' (Ezra 9.1), in addition to Deut. 23.2-9, which excludes Ammonites and Moabites from the assembly of Yhwh (but which admits Egyptians, in conflict with Ezra 9.1).[1] Although Ammonites and Moabites were obviously covered by Ezra and Nehemiah's intermarriage ban, the names of the proscribed peoples were not the essential feature of this adaptation of the law. There had been been no Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites or Jebusites in Judah for centuries, so the question of intermarriage with them was moot. The critical aspect of this development was the assertion of ethnic difference from all local non-גולה populations ('peoples of the lands', vv. 1, 2 and 11), whereby Judaeans outside the temple community were classed together with the traditional enemies of Israel.

The Strange Woman of Proverbs 1–9 as a Threat to the Judaean Temple Economy

Against the social-historical background I have just described, it becomes clear that the terminology of the polemic against the Strange Woman in Proverbs 1–9 coincides with the ideological strategy of Ezra–Nehemiah. The terms זרה and נכריה can denote both 'strangeness' to the immediate kinship group and 'foreignness' to the nation—the rhetoric of Ezra–Nehemiah exploits these two senses as one. Although the גולה community is only fictively constituted as a kinship group, anyone outside the community is classified in the language of ethnicity as a foreigner and thus excluded. A Judaean of illicit background is as alien to the community of Ezra–Nehemiah as a Moabite or Egyptian. Proverbs 1–9, proscribing relations with any woman deemed זרה, admonishes Judaean men to preserve this narrow definition of the community.

1. For the universal prohibition of exogamy as a post-exilic innovation, see S.J.D. Cohen, 'From the Bible to the Talmud: The Prohibition of Intermarriage', *HAR* 7 (1983), pp. 23-39. On the development of the legal exegetical tradition in Ezra 9 and Neh. 10, cf. M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 114-29; and D.J.A. Clines, 'Nehemiah 10 as an Example of Early Jewish Biblical Exegesis', *JSOT* 21 (1981), pp. 111-17.

We saw above that Prov. 6.24-35 and 7.5-27 are traditional units related to the אשה זרה/נכריה only by means of their introductory formulae (6.24; 7.5). These two passages could easily have originated as pre-exilic compositions. Prov. 2.16-19 and 5.1-23, however, show a closer correspondence to the circumstances of Ezra–Nehemiah. Here not only is the prescription of Ezra–Nehemiah against outside women echoed, but also the consequences of failing to heed the prohibition are indicated. In Proverbs 2 the signal warning against the אשה זרה/נכריה, whose 'house sinks down to death' (2.18), is linked with possession of the land.[1] Prov. 2.21 identifies the 'upright' who will 'inhabit the land' (ישכנו ארץ) as those who avoid the Strange Woman; 'but the wicked', the text continues, 'will be cut off from the land'. This is traditional language, the stock phraseology of Deuteronomic theology (e.g. Deut. 4.1; 5.16; 6.18; 11.9; 16.20).[2] The juxtaposition, however, of this stereotypical language of inhabiting the land with the warning against foreign women in Proverbs reflects precisely the anxiety over land tenure which was a motivating factor in Ezra–Nehemiah's campaign against exogamy.

In Prov. 5.8-10 involvement with the Strange Woman is associated with the alienation of Judaean wealth:

> Keep your way far from her (i.e. the זרה)
> and do not go near the door of her house;
> lest you give your honor to others (אחרים)
> and your years to the merciless (אכזרי);
> lest strangers (זרים) take their fill of your wealth,
> and your labors go to the house of an alien (נכרי).

The series of masculine references in vv. 9-10 (אחרים, אכזרי, זרים, נכרי) has puzzled commentators.[3] One would expect feminine forms if the text grew out of concern that Judaean men might spend their resources on foreign prostitutes or illicit lovers. The passage makes sense, however, if we connect it with the fear that Judaean property will fall under the control of alien

1. Cf. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, p. 251.

2. Cf. Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos*, p. 28; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, pp. 313-16.

3. E.g. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, p. 316; Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos*, p. 56.

families (i.e. the control of alien men), via liaisons and eventual marriages to women outside the community. The prominence of the בית אבות in post-exilic social organization, and the tumultuous social process through which various paternal estates rivalled one another for position in the temple community may account for the frequency with which the Strange Woman is denounced by reference to her 'house' (בית, 2.18; 5.8; 7.8, 27; cf. 5.10, 'the house of an alien', בית נכרי).

Ezra reports that the 'heads of the paternal estates' (Ezra 10.16) convened in order formally to identify and prosecute all members of the collective who had married outside the group. The penalties for failure to submit to these proceedings included expulsion from the temple assembly (קהל) and the confiscation of property (רכוש, Ezra 10.8). The latter term often refers to movable goods and it is usually interpreted so here.[1] The Chronicler, however, uses the word to include real estate (e.g. 1 Chron. 27.31, the summary holdings of the king including vineyards and orchards) and the term most likely refers to real property in Ezra 10.8. Since membership in the קהל entailed title to land, the dedication (חרם) of property which here accompanies expulsion from the assembly would involve the forfeiture of immovable property to the temple collective. This is a severe penalty indeed, and its currency in the post-exilic period illumines the sage's warning in Prov. 5.14. Stay away from the Strange Woman, he says, lest at the end of your life in weakness and poverty you look back and say: 'I was at the point of utter ruin in the assembled congregation' (קהל, 5.14). This plight of impoverishment combined with disgrace before the assembly is clearly reminiscent of the punishment stipulated in Ezra 10.8.[2]

Mal. 2.10-16 condemns the practice of Judaean men divorcing their legitimate wives in order to marry women outside the community.[3] Prov. 5.15-20 uses remarkably similar vocabulary

1. E.g. Hoglund, 'Achaemenid Imperial Administration', p. 431.

2. Cf. Camp: 'Whatever the range of possible meanings of Prov. 5.10-14, it is hard to disassociate it completely from Ezra 10.2-11 (cf. esp. Ezra 10.8 and Prov. 5.14)' (*Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, p. 269).

3. The identity of the בת אל נכר (Mal. 2.11) is disputed, but the best solution remains that she is a woman outside the recognized גולה

to urge marital fidelity as opposed to involvement with strange (זרה) and foreign (נכריה) women.[1] The 'wife of your youth' (נורך אשת) to whom Prov. 5.18 urges fidelity is mentioned twice in this section of Malachi (2.14, 15). Malachi's reference to 'the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and wife by covenant' (2.14) can also be compared to Proverbs' charge that the Strange Woman 'forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God'.[2] Malachi's rhetorical question in 2.10 reflects the post-exilic setting common to Ezra–Nehemiah and Proverbs, where there is an overarching need to preserve the genealogical integrity of the Judaean lineage. Malachi asks, 'Have we not all one father?' (i.e. are we not all of the same lineage?; v. 10a). He continues, 'Why then are we faithless to one another?' (i.e. by engaging in exogamous marriages; v. 10b).

Conclusion

The attack on the Strange Woman of Proverbs 1–9 thus belongs originally to a social milieu in which an ideology of descent preserved the socio-economic integrity of the community by branding outside women as נכריה/זרה. The negative language directed against the זרה in Proverbs 1–9 persisted in Hebrew wisdom literature even after it had outlived its former purpose. Ben Sira, for example, preserves the זרה as a negative stereotype (9.3), but no trace of her earlier socio-economic significance remains. Here the זרה is included indiscriminately in a catalog of types of women who according to Ben Sira should be avoided, including women singers, virgins, prostitutes, beautiful women, other men's wives, and women *per se* (Sir. 9.2-9). Thus this זרה figure is merely a misogynistic rhetorical device. From Qumran

community (see B. Glazier-McDonald, 'Intermarriage, Divorce, and the בת אל נכר', *JBL* 106 [1987], pp. 603-11; and *Malachi: The Divine Messenger* [SBLDS, 98; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987], pp. 81-120). As in Ezra–Nehemiah, those outside the temple community are charged with the religious abominations of the 'peoples of the lands'.

1. A. Robert, 'Les attaches littéraires Bibliques de Prov. I–IX', *RB* 44 (1935), p. 508.

2. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, p. 236.

has survived a sapiential work (4Q184, *DID* 5: 82-85) that draws upon the images associated with the זרה in Proverbs 1–9, but the terminology of strangeness has disappeared. Despite her depiction with features borrowed from the זרה of Proverbs 1–9, here the figure is named only הזונה. Perhaps, like the prostitute of the Apocalypse, she symbolizes Rome.[1]

In post-exilic Judah, however, the Strange Woman represented a more immediate and specific threat. The condemnation of the אשה זרה/נכריה in Proverbs 1–9 was motivated by concern for economic and corporate survival. This accounts for the vehemence of the attack which has impressed so many commentators, and reminds us of some of the social costs by which biblical Israel was reconstituted in the wake of the Babylonian destruction.[2]

1. J.M. Allegro, '"The Wiles of the Wicked Woman": A Sapiential Work from Qumran's Fourth Cave', *PEQ* 96 (1964), pp. 53-55.

2. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1990 and 1991. For kindly giving me copies of their articles before publication, I would like to thank Tamara C. Eskenazi, 'Out from the Shadows: Biblical Women in the Postexilic Era'; Kenneth G. Hoglund, 'Sociology of the Second Temple Period: The Achaemenid Context'; and E. Lipiński, 'Marriage and Divorce in the Judaism of the Persian Period'; and also Ben C. Ollenburger, whose work on Trito-Isaiah in the post-exilic context afforded me with many of the insights pursued here.

Part III
ON THE BOOK OF JOB

JOB AND THE WOMB: TEXT ABOUT MEN; SUBTEXT ABOUT WOMEN

Lillian R. Klein

Job's consistent protest is that he is unjustly punished, that he is righteous. All the male disputants also consider him righteous although his friends insist he must have sinned, albeit unknowingly, to be suffering. Job defends his own righteousness and challenges God to prove him deserving of his punishment. God, instead, shows Job how little he knows of God's powers. He rewards Job and leaves the reader thinking that Job is, indeed, righteous.

By whose standards? Divine? Human, male and female, or only male? Job's wife, the only female to have voice in the book, agrees that her husband 'maintains his integrity', but integrity is not necessarily righteousness. 'Integrity' refers to unimpaired adherence to a code of values, whereas 'righteousness' involves acting in accord with divine or moral law.[1] Are Job's integrity and righteousness in accord with one another? Does his righteousness have one import when applied to males and another when applied to females?

In order to ask these questions of the text, I direct my inquiry to the *form* of the text to search out what is ideologically significant in inconsistencies, gaps, unexpected elements or surprises; and to the *use of language*, such as symbolization, abstractions and displacement, in order to confront the way meaning is produced. By so doing, this paper seeks to explore

1. The words are also differentiated in Hebrew. ישר is 'upright', 'straightforward'; צדיק, 'righteous'; תם, 'complete, with integrity'.

what Hayden White calls the 'misrepresentations of reality' implicit in the text of Job.[1]

In a book structured on debate, any deviation in presentation, style, technique or length may result in a significant discrepancy of form. We note that Job's wife has two lines of speech in the opening frame narrative (and the new daughters are singled out for mention in the closing narrative); otherwise the presence of females is ambiguous. They are either present and silent, or else absent: and no female voice is heard throughout the entire central poetic section. Either way, women do not talk but are talked about. Although the book addresses subject matter applicable to all humanity, females as well as males, the form of the book is inconsistent with reality in that women are entirely excluded from the central, poetic portion. This exclusion of women suggests an avenue of exploration.[2] If valid, this will be

1. H. White, 'The Real, the True and the Figurative in the Human Sciences', *Profession* 92 (1992), p. 16.

2. Job has been subject to intense scrutiny; his wife has been, until recently, largely neglected. In detailed studies of the book, such as those by R. Gordis (*The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978]) or N.H. Tur-Sinai (*The Book of Job: A New Commentary* [Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967]), her words receive the mandatory commentary: she has only six words; the remarks are commensurately short. In less detailed analyses, she is often ignored. A respected collection of essays on Job includes one cursory mention of his wife in the entire book although the servants and children of Job are elsewhere identified as 'human beings as vital, as precious, as worthy of life... as Job himself' (P. Weiss, 'God, Job and Evil', in N.M. Glatzer [ed.], *Dimensions of Job* [New York: Schocken Books, 1969], p. 183). It is an interesting oversight that Job's wife is not included among those worthy of life. Only recently has this disregarded woman drawn some attention. D. Penchansky interprets 'the story of Job's wife [as] a parable that carries the prescriptive message of the entire work' (*The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job* [Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990], p. 85): and I. Pardes suggests that Job's wife 'prefigures or perhaps generates the impatience of the dialogues' (*Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992], p. 147), which signals the beginning of Job's 'growing interest in human relations' (p. 52). Job's wife has been traditionally regarded as peripheral in the extreme, but is now becoming more noticeable.

repeated in other deviations of form and in the use of language, generating misrepresentations offered as reality.

Other disparities of form become apparent when the speeches of the several male discussants are compared with that of the one female. Job's wife has very few words—six in all. Women tend to have fewer words than men in the Hebrew Bible, which is not surprising given the patriarchal orientation of the book, but the disparity is extreme in Job, especially when compared to the verbosity of the male debaters.[1]

Another difference is in the style of the speeches: the words of Job's wife are not metaphoric, as those of the men are; and, in diametric and deleterious contrast, she implies cursing of God whereas they praise him. Furthermore, the woman uses none of the formalities of dispute observed by the male speakers. The disputes between Job and his friends observe a regular structure. N.H. Tur-Sinai has commented on the purposefulness and precision of detail.

> Every speech opened with some introductory verses, in which the orator asked for permission to speak. He then quoted an utterance of his opponent which was to be the subject of counter arguments. After refuting his opponent, and after a sentence or two bespeaking the attention of the latter, he stated his own view and tried to prove it. He wound up on a comforting or forbidding note designed, as it were, to preclude any further argument... Each point in this debate fabric was supported by evidence.[2]

The substance of the male debates proffers arguments and proofs drawn from folk wisdom and the natural sciences of native and foreign peoples to support the testimony of facts or authority offered by the debating men. In contrast, Job's wife speaks without formal structure and without demonstrating the

1. Many of the books of the Prophets have no overt feminine voice, nor does Qoheleth among the Writings. By comparison, in the book of Ruth, where female voices prevail, either Ruth or Naomi may dominate their mutual conversations; however, Ruth is typically brief and (metaphorically) direct before Boaz, who is comparatively more verbose.

2. Tur-Sinai, *Job*, p. lxii.

logic of her reasoning. Her words permit the reader to infer a syllogism:

If You live to bless God
And Your life is worse than death
Then Curse (bless) God and die.[1]

Logical reasoning is implied, not stated. Although the wife may be offering the logical conclusion of her deliberations, Job's chastising response conveys his presumption that her words are not thought out but spontaneous. Job's wife is the only character in the entire book who speaks without verbalizing a process of reasoning.

Rhetorically, the women's initial words look like either praising or else chiding: 'You still clutching your integrity?' (2.9). We may note that although rhetorical questions constitute a paramount literary device, used by all of the speakers, Job's wife is the only speaker in the book who uses a rhetorical question and, still, does not expect an answer to it. From the Adversary to Job and his friends to God, these questions, frequently in a series, serve to open an argument or to focus an argument that has already been developed. While the three friends illustrate approaches to rationality and Elihu offers a youthful but worthwhile argument, God offers the ultimate argument, and his argument is exclusively rhetorical. Job and his friends' rhetorical questions are freely argued and answered. In contrast, God's rhetorical questions seem to be understood as beyond challenge, and those of the wife as beneath competence. Both God and the wife remain unanswered. The wife, with a single question, challenges her husband strictly rhetorically, providing her own answer and thereby exempting Job from the

1. The ambiguity of ברך in this verse has drawn critical attention. Marvin Pope suggests that since cursing God does not necessarily lead to death, Job's wife tells him to at least 'give vent to his feelings, or hers', in the little time he has left to live (*Job* [AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983], p. 23). Edwin Good, reading 2.9 positively and negatively, offers several interpretations: as a farewell, as an encouragement, or as an expression of pity, positively; or as rebellion, negatively. He acknowledges that Job hears her words negatively (*In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job with a Translation* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990], p. 200).

necessity of an answer.[1] The textual use of rhetoric differentiates the female speaker from the male human (to distinguish from the divine) speakers, and contrasts the female ironically with God.

A further aspect in which the speech of Job's wife deviates from all other speeches is in its use of language. The beauty of the male disputes is in the play of figurative language far more than in the structural formality or sophistication of reasoning. But Job's wife is afforded no dramatic images, no grandiose metaphors. The males in the book express their opinions and their desires in the formality of dispute, the fashion of reasoning and the art of language, whereas female opinion and desire are exposed with neither formal or logical containment nor beauty of language: on all three counts, the wife's speech is differentiated from all others in the book. Woman is almost silenced, is relegated to the periphery, is afforded none of the customs valued by males, and is given words that no human male utters ('Curse God', 2.9). It seems that the curse uttered by his wife prompts Job to equate her with the 'wicked':[2] 'You speak as one of the wicked [women] would speak indeed' (2.10); but as we shall see, the analysis of language reveals that more is involved.

Related to the namelessness of Job's wife is the fact that her words are relegated to the narrative frame story which provides a background for the all-male enclave in the poetic center of the book. As Job's wife appears in the opening prose section of the frame story, the 'replacement' daughters are given unusual emphasis in the closing section. The children who were so callously eliminated in the prologue (chs. 1–2) are replaced in the epilogue (42.13-15), but there is no further mention of the

1. Indeed, he does not answer her question: he rebukes her for her words. All the other speakers' questions are rhetorical in that they do not seek to elicit information.

2. The Hebrew word הנבלות, which I translate as 'the wicked women', has also been translated as 'foolish women', based on the root sequence נבל, 'senseless, foolish' (BDB, p. 615), but this translation fails to convey the immoral and disgraceful aspects implicit in the word. In Deuteronomy, the bride who is not a virgin is stoned to death because 'she has wrought folly, נבלה, in Israel' (Deut. 22.21). Job does not call his wife 'foolish', with its implications of 'silly', but 'wicked'.

wife. Her role in child-bearing is subsumed though she has presumably borne twenty children. In what might look like an alleviation of this misogyny, the daughters in the closing narrative section are specifically named even though the sons are not. They are ימימה, 'dove',[1] קציעה, 'fragrance'[2] and קרן הפוך, 'horn of eye-shadow'.[3] The daughters are further described as beautiful: 'In all the land there were no women so fair as Job's daughters' (42.15). Two of the three names allude to qualities that men desire in woman: sweet fragrance and the seductive charm associated with cosmetics and beauty; and we may infer that the third, 'dove'[4] had a similar connotation possibly associated with its soft, cooing sound.[5]

These daughters are capable of creating desire in men and are valued for it: Job gives them inheritance among their brothers (42.15). Pardes interprets this generosity as proof of the book's new-found understanding of women,[6] but such understanding does not accord with the fact that Job's wife still has no name and has, in fact, disappeared. In contrast, I suggest, the text discloses that masculine desire is enjoyed when its object is beautiful, desirable and unattainable maidens/daughters; but

1. This is generally agreed upon. Pope translates the name as 'dove' (*Job*, p. 348); Tur-Sinai as 'little dove' (*Job*, p. 581).

2. This translation is in response to a suggestion by Athalya Brenner. Pope translates קציעה as 'cinnamon' (*Job*, p. 348); Tur-Sinai identifies the noun 'specifically as the peel of the aromatic plant *Laurus cassia*' (*Job*, p. 581).

3. My translation. Compare Pope: 'horn of Kohl' (*Job*, p. 348); Tur-Sinai: 'Flask of the blue paint with which women smeared their eyes' (*Job*, p. 581). Many commentaries disregard the daughters and the significance of their names altogether; for example Gordis, *Job*; Penchansky, *The Betrayal of God*.

4. See above. This *hapax legomenon* is thought to be derived from an Aramaic word for 'dove' (BDB, p. 410b). The more familiar word for 'dove', יונה, is not utilized in this text; and the metaphoric associations for יואה cannot be assumed for ימימה.

5. If the sound of the dove is the desired connotative image, the daughters' names utilize three sensory images—auditory, olfactory and visual—to evoke a sensual response. This seems more plausible than Tur-Sinai's assessment that the daughters' names disclose a 'tradition which no doubt gave further particulars of Job's family' (*Job*, p. 582).

6. *Countertraditions*, p. 153.

masculine desire per se is otherwise feared and denigrated, and it is foisted off on mature, accessible women. The latent misogyny is reasserted when Job is described as living to an old age to see his sons' sons to four generations. Daughters, despite their inheritances, do not carry the father's name; their descendants are apparently of little interest to Job. Naming females or not suggests that mature women, mothers, are in a different realm from young, nubile daughters in this text. We will return to this issue presently.

The 'wickedness' of women is underscored by Job's wife being the only speaker in the book who remains nameless, another deviation of form. Biblical literature repeatedly demonstrates that failing to have a name and to pass on one's name is tantamount to not existing. The significance of names, of patrimony, even of territory, is so pervasive that naming can be used ironically, as in the Samson narrative.[1] Clearly, there is no irony in the namelessness of Job's wife. Indeed, after her words, she vanishes in and from the text even though she implicitly bears a second round of ten children.

Finally, only Job's wife is identified with the Adversary. Moshe Greenberg has pointed out the irony in the wife's 'expressing her exasperation with her husband in the very terms used by God to praise him ("still hold on to your integrity?")', and in her 'unwittingly [advocating] the Adversary's cause to Job'.[2] It is not accidental that a woman's mouth, however innocently, echoes the Adversary' words. This subtle but unambiguous association of the Adversary and Job's wife—evil and woman, both personified—is consistent with and reinforces the derogatory subtext about woman which is conveyed in anomalies of form in an otherwise homogeneous text.[3] These textual

1. Samson's name, שמשון, echoing שם, 'name', is as ironic as the fact that his observant, intelligent mother is unnamed while his sceptical, rather dense father (Manoah) is named. Cf. E.L. Greenstein, 'The Riddle of Samson', *Prooftexts* 34 (1981), pp. 237-60.

2. M. Greenberg, 'Job', in R. Alter and F. Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 286.

3. The Adversary, who has two speeches, is also restricted to the narrative frame (the prologue, in fact). This is justified by his acting as a

incongruities consistently segregate Job's wife, paradigm of woman, from the male world; but they fail to provide much understanding beyond a discernable misogyny. Let us turn to language analysis to see if the differences in form are reflected in the use of language and to explore what, if anything, is revealed thereby.

The text offers an opening in that it is singularly focused on what Job wants: to be recognized as 'righteous' despite his suffering. Job's desire is clear, but what does the text show that his wife desires?[1] Although Job's wife does not use a word for desire, her words make clear that her desire is directed only toward her husband; there is no suggestion of her own suffering. The distress conveyed in her words is the burden she emphatically feels for her husband's suffering. Her desire is that his agony be ended, whatever the cost, when his life is worse than death: 'Curse God and die!'

As his wife never thinks of herself, Job never thinks of her. He thinks of his friends as he poses retorts to their presumptions of guilt, and he thinks of God as he demands a response to his questions; but these thoughts all ultimately turn on himself. Job professes to desire the goodness that God wishes of his people, but Job's goodness is without compassion; it is 'ritually correct'. He has offered burnt sacrifices to counter any hidden, forbidden thoughts his children may have had (1.5), with the implication that he is protecting *his* extended household. Even Job's expansive protests (29.7-25) celebrate his self-righteous social pleasure in his integrity. It is apparent that Job's primary desire is not only to *be* just but also to be *recognized* as just; recognition is proof of his position. Inasmuch as the text does not fault Job for his self-centeredness, this quality is apparently not to be condemned in a man; it suggests that males are socially

catalyst, no longer necessary once the action has been precipitated; and the Adversary is not a consistent object of textual breaks either in form or in language. See Athalya Brenner's discussion of the Adversary's function in 'Job the Pious: The Characterization of Job in the Narrative Framework of the Book', *JSOT* 43 (1989), pp. 37-52.

1. Churchmen have typically interpreted Job's wife as a temptress, and her words as a temptress's words. Pope notes, 'Augustine called Job's wife *diaboli adjutrix* and Calvin, *organum Satanae*' (*Job*, pp. 21-22 n. 9).

experienced as egocentric. We note that woman's desire is not directed toward herself (or even her children) but is also focused on the male's needs. By the same token of social perceptions, the text assumes that woman is expected to deny herself and concentrate totally on her husband.

In the dialogue between Job and his friends, a range of terms for desire (not always exact synonyms) are used.[1] Despite the prominence of words for desire, only once does Job say specifically what it is he desires:

13.3 I *desire* (אחפץ) to speak to the Almighty and to argue with God...

Nevertheless, expressions of desire permeate the debates (the speakers' name appear in brackets at the end of each quotation):

4.6 Is not your fear of God your confidence, your *hope* (תקותך) the integrity of your ways? (Eliphaz)
5.5 ... the thirsty [ones] *pant with desire* (שאף) after his wealth (Eliphaz)
7.2 Like a slave *longing* (ישאף)... (Job)
8.13 ... So the *hope of* (תקות) the ungodly shall perish (Bildad)
9.3 Though he *wished* (יחפץ) to dispute with him... (Job)
14.15 You will *long for* (תכסף) the work of your hands (Job)
17.15 Where then is *my hope* (תקותי) and who shall see *my hope* (תקותי) (Job)
20.20 ... surely he will not know respite from his *cravings* (בבטנו); his *desired* (חמודו) things will not save him (Zofar)
20.23 When he has filled *his belly* (בטנו, his seat of desire), he will vent his anger (Zofar)
21.14 ... We have no *desire* (חפצנו) to know your ways (Job)
21.21 ... what does he *desire* (מה חפצו) for the family he leaves behind? (Job)
23.13 He [God] does what his being *desires* (אין והוה) (Job)
27.8 What is the *hope of* (תקות) the ungodly? (Job)
31.9 If my heart has been *enticed* (נפתה) by a woman (Job)
31.16 If I have kept the poor from their *desire* (חפץ)... (Job)

1. The verbs חפץ ('delight in'), כסף ('long for'), אבה ('desire'), שאף ('desire'), חמד ('desire'), אוה ('desire, incline toward'), פתה ('entice, seduce'). Noun phrases in this connection are, for instance, בטן ('belly', the seat of desire) and תקוה ('hope').

31.27 If my heart was secretly *enticed* (ויפת)... (Job)
33.32 I *desire* (חפצתי) to clear you... (Elihu)
34.36 I *entreat* (אבי) that Job be tried... (Elihu)
36.20 Do not *desire* (תשאף) the night to clear you (Elihu)
39.9 Will he *wish* (היאבה), the wild ox, to serve you? (God)

Aside from Job's one statement of desire (13.3)—to argue with God, which is normally beyond realization—Job and his friends attribute desire to others: the poor, the envious, the slave, or God; otherwise, desire is expressed in the negative or subjunctive. These are all 'safe' desires: presumably beyond fulfillment, ascribed to others, or denied and thus distanced—despite their being passionately expressed. Significantly, words for desire of a woman are used only in denial. Job disclaims that he has looked at a maiden (31.1), using a euphemism even to make that statement, and never alludes to desiring a woman, including his wife.

31.1 I have made a covenant with my eyes, so how can I *look* (אתבונן, *hithpael*) at a virgin

The word 'look', which implies 'desire', is usually interpreted as 'look lustfully' (NIV) or 'look intently' (KJV), but the root of this word (בין) implies 'understanding, 'discernment', and in the *hithpael* 'show oneself attentive, consider diligently'.[1] Such language intellectualizes and abstracts the danger of desire, thus distancing desire even as it is verbalized. No word for lust is put into Job's mouth, even in repudiation. Job further emphasizes his distancing from desire: when he denies that his heart has been enticed by another woman, he evokes a punishment which is sexual and explicit, but is inflicted on his wife, not himself: his wife would 'grind for another man and let others crouch over her' (31.10). The grinding, presumably of grain, also has a sexual innuendo, as Athalya Brenner has shown by calling attention to 'the image of two millstones, one on top of the other'.[2] If Job has sinned, he says, let his wife satisfy another man's needs. Even if he knows the punishment is irrelevant because he has not sinned, Job invokes sin and servitude for his

1. BDB, p. 107.
2. In A. Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), p. 143.

wife as appropriate compensation for his own hypothetical sins. He also defines the wife's role: to prepare food for and submit to her husband sexually. Desire is not acknowledged in either partner, which connotes a strong element of repression; and no mention is made of the wife's function as mother (but see below). This brings us back to the matter of mature women and motherhood—once again postponed.

The closest Job comes to acknowledging his own sexuality is his complaint that his wife finds him repulsive because of his breath:

19.17 My sigh is strange, loathsome (זרה) to my wife

The adjective used to describe Job's breath is derived from the verb root זור, 'be loathsome', a cognate of the verb סור, 'be a stranger'.[1] Rendered in the feminine singular, but with the accent on the first syllable, the adjective זרה is visually identical with the adjective associated with woman, אשה זרה, a strange woman or harlot.[2] The choice of this adjective suggests that sexual implications are associated with Job's loathsome breath. Furthermore, comments by Tur-Sinai sustain the sexual innuendo. Differentiating רוחי, 'sigh', from רוח, 'wind, spirit', Tur-Sinai equates it with the parallel verb in the corresponding stich, Hebrew חנותי, which he understands as 'to sigh with desire'.[3] Apparently Job, despite his sores and scabs, would be intimate with his wife, judging by the words he uses to couch her repudiation of him. However, no desire for his wife is verbalized. The text does not confound Job's desire for justice with more mundane desires, which are left ambiguous.

Even the desirability of woman is rendered dangerous. Job protests he could not 'look upon a virgin' (31.1) and that his 'heart has [not] been enticed by a woman' (31.9). Man's only defense against what is perceived as the 'lure' of woman is to abstain from even looking, lest that lead to covetousness. It is thus woman, not man's desires, that generates this male anti-covenantal behavior. Desire for woman is superseded by passion

1. B. Davidson, *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (repr.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), p. 237.
2. BDB, p. 266.
3. *Job*, p. 300.

for God, expressed in dialogue between the men as they reason probable cause and effect relative to Job's condition. Whereas sexual desire is suppressed or denied, reason is valued by the men; and the book celebrates the logical give-and-take of disputations between Job and his friends, and between God and the Adversary. There is no suggestion that Job and his friends are not passionate in their disputes, but their eloquent expressions of desire are controlled by formality and logic, not subject to the illogic of emotional desire.

The male voices may seek to control, repress, deny the other half of humanity, but they cannot. Although woman has no voice in the central poetic chapters of the book, she is not forgotten; ironically, the men keep talking about her in the poetry. Interestingly, it is not in her role as *femme fatale* that woman haunts the male voices. She may occasionally cause men pain through her seductive powers, but the men allude to her more frequently as being an agent of life's grief by *giving birth.* Woman is so identified with childbearing that she may vanish in the image: the womb frequently becomes a synecdoche for woman, with woman 'disappearing' in the anatomical part. Job questions, 'Why did I not die from the womb (מרחם), come forth from the womb (מבטן) and expire?' (3.11).[1]

Exploration of 'desire' has led, by way of suppression of females, to the womb, which is specifically referred to twelve times in the book of Job. Curiously, two words, בטן and רחם, are used as synonymous designations for 'womb', and are carefully balanced in the text. The words alternate so consistently that any time בטן is mentioned, רחם follows, and vice versa.[2]

1. God, in his reproach to Job, characterizes males as those who beget:

> 36.28 Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew?

The male as begetter is not qualified in a synecdoche as a penis; in an adjoining verse, however, the female (the speaker is a presumably male God) is so imaged as a womb:

> 38.29 From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?

See also Job 38.8, discussed below.

2. However, sequences may begin with either word. It is worth noting that רחם/בטן occurs in the Hebrew Bible as a parallel pair six times,

1.21	בטן				
3.10	בטן	3.11	רחם	3.11	בטן
10.18	רחם	10.19	בטן		
19.17	בטן				
24.20	בטן				
31.15	בטן	31.15	רחם	31.18	בטן
38.8	רחם	38.29	בטן		

Whereas רחם refers specifically to the womb, בטן pertains primarily to 'belly' in the sense of 'source of hunger' or 'abdomen'; and it is also used in Job in this sense (15.2; 20.23; 32.18, 19; 40.16). However, Job uses בטן more frequently in its secondary sense, to refer to the female organ of reproduction.[1]

Two verses which allude to 'womb' specifically identify the woman with whom the womb is associated, and both times the woman is Job's mother:

1.21 Naked I came from the *womb* (בטן) of *my mother*...

31.18 ... from the *womb* (בטן) of *my mother* I guided...

A further ten references to 'womb' use the word as a synecdoche for woman as the agent of birth:

3.10 ... for he did not shut the doors of my *womb* (בטן)

3.11 Why did I not perish from the *womb* (רחם) and die as I came from the *womb* (בטן)...

10.18 Why then did you bring me out of the *womb* (רחם)?

10.19 ... straight from the *womb* (בטן) to the grave!

24.20 The *womb* (רחם) forgets them...

31.15 Did not he who made me in the *womb* (בטן) make him?
And he formed us the same in the *womb* (רחם).

In these verses, woman is reduced to a womb; but in three additional verses, the womb is claimed by male voices, however figuratively. Listen to Job:

19.17 I am loathsome to the sons of *my womb*.[2]

I suggest that Job alludes to his wife, his 'womb', as his

three of which are in Job (3.11; 10.18-19; 31.15).

1. In other sections of the Hebrew Bible, רחם may denote the organ of reproduction (Gen. 25.23) or, more typically, birth (Judg. 13.5; Ps. 110.3).

2. This phrase is often emended; for example, 'I am loathsome to the sons of my own mother' (RSV [1973]), or 'I am loathsome to my own family' (RSV [1991]).

possession and thereby figuratively claims her womb as his. The sense of the verse suggests that his sons are repelled by him (though all his biological sons have died at the hands of the Adversary).[1]

God evokes a 'cosmic' womb through figurative language.

> 38.8 Or [who] stopped up the sea with doors
> when it gushed forth from the *womb* (רחם)?

In this verse, YHWH simultaneously claims a womb and images the womb as a source of death. The sea, the life force, threatens to overwhelm, bringing death, and must be contained by closing doors against death—and life. What results is, as Alter suggests, 'a virtual oxymoron, expressing a paradoxical feeling that God's creation involves a necessary holding in check of destructive forces and a sustaining of those same forces because they are also forces of life'.[2] In another verse, the implication is that God's womb delivers ice, also an image of life-and-death:

> 38.29 ... from whose *womb* (בטן) comes the ice?

Significantly, both life and death are identified with the woman's womb, decried by males but claimed by both earthly man and the male God.

The poetic chapters of Job reduce woman to a receptacle for birth and, thereby, the pain man—not woman—endures in life. 'Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble' (14.1) and 'What is man, that he can be clean? Or he that is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?' (15.14). Even man's inability to achieve purity, accepted in these lines, is subsequently displaced upon woman: 'How then can man be righteous before God? How can he who is born of woman be clean?' (25.4).

If a woman is not equated with a womb by virtue of childlessness, then she is an object of utmost pity, as expressed by redundant adjectives and invidious comparison: 'the barren childless woman' is linked with 'the abject widow' (24.21).

1. However, 'sons' may refer to extended family (cf. Deut. 18.5; Judg. 19.22). The meaning of the clause is not clear but the claiming of the womb, however oblique, is.

2. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p. 99.

Woman is either a womb that gives birth to man's grief or a failed womb. It is hard to know which is better. Either way, there is no potential for woman to be righteous in this text.

The book of Job overtly weighs, in elaborately metaphorical language, the logical give-and-take of disputations between Job and his friends, and between God and the Adversary, to weigh Job's claim to righteousness. Only desolate language, with merely tacit systematic reasoning, is attributed to Job's wife, woman personified—otherwise reduced to a womb.

Analysis of form and language discloses Job's proclaimed righteousness to be the posturing of a male—of a patriarchal society, including God—manifestly at the expense of woman. Paradoxically, Job *is* righteous—in accord with divine law, personified by God—in this text, despite the misogyny which contradicts the strictures of Torah, for instance 'Honor your father and mother... ' (Exod. 20.12). However, the use of language by males is shown to incorporate a subtext of preoccupation with females, specifically female reproductive powers. This coupled rejection of woman and suppressed interest in woman's sexual functions discloses a significant fissure in the overt male concerns about righteousness depicted in Job.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF JOB: MRS JOB AS CATALYST*

Ellen van Wolde

This article argues that the character of Job experiences a development: the Job with whom the book opens is not the person whom he gradually becomes. This becomes particularly clear by comparing the prologue (Job 1–2) and the epilogue (Job 42). In addition, we shall discover that Job's wife undeniably contributes to Job's development.

The Beginning of the Book (Job 1.1–2.8)

From the first verse onwards the book of Job portrays Job as an honest, upright and God-fearing man who keeps away from evil. He has ten children, a large herd of cattle and a great deal of riches. His wife is neither mentioned as a member of his family nor as part of his property. Apparently she is irrelevant. Job 1.4 tells us how Job's sons arrange feasts and include their sisters among the guests. The anxious father is not sure whether their behaviour is good or bad but, as we see in 1.5, he tends towards the negative view. He offers sacrifices so that his children will, if necessary, be purified and sanctified. Job's thoughts come to us via the narrator, who knows his character's motives: 'Perhaps my sons have sinned and ברך God in their hearts'. Job does this not once, but every time his sons have been feasting. Is this a manifestation of his goodness or is he just being over-anxious? On the one hand it could be a token of Job's

* Parts of this article are based on or reprinted from my articles, 'A Text-Semantic Study of the Hebrew Bible, Illustrated by Noah and Job', *JBL* 113.1 (1994), pp. 47-63; and 'Job 42,1-6: The Reversal of Job', in W.A.M. Beuken (ed.), *The Book of Job* (BETL, 113; Leuven: Peeters, 1994).

piety, just in case any of his children have sinned.[1] On the other hand it might be a token of his scrupulous faith. By means of sacrifices he tries to make amends for the wrongs that may or may not have been committed. Thus he gives the impression of being a believer who thinks that he must be in control of everything. He appears to be someone who implicitly knows what is right and what is wrong and what pleases or displeases God, as if he could have God's perspective. What at first sight seemed to be clear proof of Job's piety later begins to look a little ambiguous and perhaps less favourable.[2]

The next scene (1.6-12) takes place in heaven. God praises Job, calls him his servant and commends his piety and godliness. The satan is not convinced of this piety and asks:

> Is it for naught (חנם) that Job fears God? Have you not put a hedge about him and about his house and about all that he has on every side? You have blessed (ברך) the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But lay your hand upon all he has, and he will curse (ברך) you to your face (1.9-11).

And Job is afflicted: his cattle are stolen, his servants killed and his children all die during one of their parties. But Job's reaction is one of resignation: 'YHWH has given, and YHWH has taken away; blessed (ברך) be the name of YHWH' (1.21b).

In the second scene in heaven (2.1-7), the satan repeats his request to God: 'Skin for skin—all that a man has he will give up for his life. But lay your hand on his bones and his flesh, and he will curse (ברך) you to your face' (2.4-5). And Job undergoes more misery: his skin is covered with painful sores and he sits upon an ash heap.

1. N. Habel, *The Book of Job* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1985), p. 88; J.E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 69.

2. A. Brenner, 'Job the Pious? The Characterization of Job in the Narrative Framework of the Book', *JSOT* 43 (1989), p. 44; D.J.A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC, 17; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), pp. 15-16; E. Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 192-93; E. van Wolde, *Meneer en Mevrouw Job: Job in gesprek met zijn vrouw, zijn vrienden en God* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1991), pp. 18-23.

The First Phase in Job's Development: The Confrontation with his Wife (2.9-10)

All of a sudden Job's wife appears. Where does she come from? The narrator has not mentioned her earlier. Job has just been saying that he is all alone in the world ('Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return', 1.21a). Apparently she does not count. Anyhow, Mrs Job speaks up and says (2.9):

עדך מחזיק בתמתך	You still keep your integrity
ברך אלהים	ברך God
ומת	and die

The first part of her short speech (2.9a) is a literal repetition of what God himself stated earlier in 2.3; and the second part (2.9b) seems to resemble the satan's words in 1.11 and 2.5b:

God:	עדנו מחזיק בתמתו	He still keeps his integrity
Job's wife:	עדך מחזיק בתמתך	You still keep your integrity
The satan:	אל פניך יברכך	He will ברך you to your face
Job's wife:	ברך אלהים	ברך God

Job's wife, then, repeats the words of both God and the satan and adds a new element to them, namely 'die'.

In the prologue the word ברך functions in different and even contradictory senses: the very first time ברך is used in 1.5 it means the opposite of its usual meaning, viz. 'to curse' God or, to use the Hebrew play on words, to 'say adieu' to God. Job is afraid that his sons may have said farewell to God in their hearts. The next occurrence of ברך is in 1.10. There the satan uses the word twice, once to express that YHWH has always 'blessed' and protected Job, and once in the opposite meaning: he expects Job 'to curse' God. Two contradictory meanings of one and the same word used in one sentence! The next time ברך appears is in 1.21. There Job makes his choice between the two possibilities of ברך: he chooses to 'bless' the name of YHWH. In 2.5 the satan uses it again with the opposite meaning. To summarize: in the prologue to Job ברך is used twice (1.10 and 1.21) in the standard way ('to bless') and three times (1.15, 11 and 2.5) in a newly created contradictory sense, 'to say adieu' to God.[1]

1. For a more extensive description of the relation between the

While ברך usually has only one meaning, in the context of Job 1–2 a contradictory meaning is created, so that in 2.9 it would be possible to have both meanings function side by side. In 2.9 Job's wife forces her husband to choose. He can curse God, which might make God leave him and result in his death. This interpretation is made possible by the sense of 'curse', as in 1.5, 11 and 2.5. Alternatively, Job can bless God and die with that blessing on his lips. This interpretation is possible because ברך may mean 'bless', as in 1.10 and 1.21.[1] This double force of ברך shows the nature of the double choice Job faces: the choice between blessing God or cursing him; and between life and death. Mrs Job confronts her husband with this choice and with its implication, that is to say, death. She represents absolute confrontation, as if saying, 'Consider what you are doing, make a decision and do not just undergo everything passively'. It is his wife's question that sets Job thinking, as can be inferred from his response.

Job's response can be better understood if compared with his verbal reaction to the first series of catastrophes he has suffered before his wife appears:

1.21b-22	2.10
YHWH has given, YHWH has taken away	Should we accept good from the hands of the deity, should we not accept evil?
Blessed be the name of YHWH	
In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.	In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

The number and nature of the differences between the two responses is striking. The first time Job speaks he refers to God by his name, YHWH. Thus Job acknowledges YHWH as Lord. The second time, immediately following his wife's remarks, Job speaks about God as 'the deity', האלהים. This sounds more detached. Moreover, in his response to his wife Job does not talk

Hebrew language system (paradigm), in which words may have many divergent meanings, and the realization in the concrete context (syntagm), see van Wolde, 'A Text-Semantic Study of the Hebrew Bible'.

1. Brenner, 'Job the Pious?', n. 3; Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 200.

to God but *about* God, not to YHWH but about *the deity*. And the second difference is closely related to the first. In 1.21 Job expressly praises God and blesses him, whereas in 2.10 there is no blessing at all. Job still claims that a human being receives everything from God but now, for the first time, he says that not only good but also evil comes from God. This, however, does not end in Job's cursing God, as it is explicitly written: 'And Job did not sin'. Ultimately, in 2.10 Job neither blesses nor curses. A third difference between the two responses is that the first is a statement whereas the second is formulated as a question. His previous confidence seems to have been replaced by uncertainty. The fourth difference seems to illustrate this shift in mood. In 2.10 Job 'did not sin with his lips', while in 1.21 'Job did not sin'. Neither blessing nor sin crosses his lips, but internal doubt cannot be ruled out here. Because the words used in both cases are exactly identical, the difference made by 'with his lips' is conspicuous. But the most remarkable difference between Job's reactions before and after the appearance of his wife is the fifth and last: the perspective from which Job speaks has changed completely. In 1.21 he speaks from a heavenly or godly perspective: 'YHWH gives and takes'. In 2.10, however, he speaks from an earthly or human perspective: 'Should we accept good from the hands of the deity, should we not accept evil?' (2.10).

The literary function of the woman in this story is intriguing. On the one hand she is completely overshadowed by her husband, and seems irrelevant to the story. On the other hand she sets Job thinking, although he dismisses her words as foolish. Nevertheless, her speech has its effect. By confronting Job with his own death and pointing out to him the choice between ברך-blessing and ברך-cursing, she forces him to react. And he who has earlier chosen to bless and not sin, from now on does neither of the two. His wife introduces death and awakens doubt in him. Job is no longer sure of anything and begins to ask himself questions. He even starts to reason from a human point of view instead of automatically adopting the perspective of YHWH. Thus the woman plays an important part in the development of the story. With her help, Job changes from a cocksure believer into an asker of questions. A cocksure believer would probably not have been made the subject of a book, and certainly not an

exciting book. The book of Job is made human and lifelike by the doubt and the fighting spirit of a man who wants to confront his faith in God with his suffering and misery, with his life and death.

The Second Phase in Job's Development: The Dialogues with his Friends (Job 3–37)

Once he is roused by his wife's question, Job goes on. His confusion and desperation increase perceptibly. His outburst takes the form of a monologue (Job 3) which opens with a curse (קלל) of the day of his birth. There is not a word about ברך, neither of blessing nor of cursing YHWH, but Job does take the word קלל, 'to confound/curse', into his mouth. He reproaches YHWH for putting a 'hedge' around his life, preventing him from looking beyond the present and from appreciating the meaning of his life and his suffering (3.23). He says that he had rather not been born or had died at birth because then he would not have experienced this senseless affair. Now he has to face the fact that what he had feared most has come upon him (3.25-26): his life, of which he liked to be in charge, in which he had created order, which he had founded on his faith in YHWH, expressed by his sacrifices and good behaviour—this life now slips away from him: 'I have neither quiet nor peace of mind, for me there is only confusion and anxiety'.[1]

From this moment on (Job 4) Job's friends can no longer restrain themselves, and enter into a discussion with him. In the dialogues the friends' point of departure is the image of God as it has been transmitted and written down in the centuries before them. In this view God created a web of causality into the world: people's lives depend on what they do. If they do good, they will be rewarded; if they do wicked things, they will be punished. According to this concept of causality people hold their fate and indirectly also God in their own hands, for God watches over this relation between cause and effect.[2] Thus,

1. Cf. Clines, *Job 1–20*, pp. 102-103.
2. Cf. M. Tsevat, 'The Meaning of the Book of Job', in *The Meaning of the Book of Job and Other Biblical Studies: Essays on the Literature and Religion of the Hebrew Bible* (New York and Dallas, 1980), p. 3.

human logic is the standard applied to God. On the basis of this view God is called 'righteous'. The friends, who actually came to comfort Job, attack him by resorting to this worldview and image of God. Job rejects the principle that is at the root of the friends' arguments. They reason from reality as it is perceived towards its cause, and argue that Job's suffering is the result of previous sinning. Job does not say that he has never made any mistakes, but he categorically denies that his suffering is caused by his behaviour. The arguments of the friends are based on a teaching or a doctrine. Job's arguments in the conversations with his friends are grounded in his life, his experience and his personality.

At the same time Job has the same thoughts as his friends, for he seems to believe as much as they do in the doctrine of retribution or in moral cause and effect. His opinion regarding the behaviour of his sons (1.5) has already implied this, and now his reaction to Eliphaz points in the same direction. Things are going badly for Job, the reason being, in his own opinion, that God holds his previously committed transgressions against him (7.19-21). He is impressed by God's omnipotence as judge and by the weakness of human beings, who are insignificant creatures: 'Although I am irreproachable, he would find me guilty' (9.20). It is not just God's omnipotence which strikes Job, but also the absolute arbitrariness with which it is exercised. This God behaves like a jailer who is continuously on the look-out for people who make mistakes (10.14). Nobody can hide from his eyes. If he sees something that is not appropriate, he takes punitive measures. Job has an image of God as a supreme jailer and he denounces this God. What kind of a jailer is he if he does not himself heed the legal system that he guards, and who acts inconsistently? By upbringing and tradition Job is inclined towards the same idea as his friends, but he does not understand why God does not keep to this arrangement and, instead, acts entirely arbitrarily and violently. Indeed, does God torment Job 'for nothing' (9.17, חנם)? After all, God can even destroy the cosmos just like that or 'for nothing' if it pleases him.

Thus the word חנם, which played an important part in the prologue of the book, reappears in Job's reaction to his suffering (9.17). In the prologue the satan inquired whether Job believed

God חנם, 'for nothing' or 'without purpose of gain' (1.9). Somewhat later it appears that God has ruined Job 'for nothing' or 'without cause or reason'. Now Job uses this concept, חנם, to indicate God's total arbitrariness. Job reproaches God not only for his creating everything gratis and for nothing, but also for his creating everything without a purpose, or in any case without his creatures' being able to discern that purpose. Job asserts that God crushes him for no reason and that he also crushes or rewards others for no reason. Everything has become entirely arbitrary for Job. To him, all creation has become void of logic now that the one-good-turn-deserves-another principle no longer seems to work. The failure of the doctrine of moral retribution is inevitably catching up with him, even though it is Job's basic conviction and something which he believes in with his heart and soul. Still, he cannot give up this conviction. He calls for restoration of the rational principles in the relationship between God and humanity, for righteousness that is visible.

Yet cracks in Job's view gradually become perceptible now and then, when, for instance, he begins to wonder whether God in fact sees with human eyes and shares human limitations. Job literally asks God: 'Do you have eyes of flesh and do you see as mortal man sees?' (10.4-5). Can a person actually see God through human eyes? If a human being looks at God with his or her eyes, what can this human being see apart from what his or her own eyes permit? Thus Job poses the crucial question about human images of God. Job's heritage has provided him with an image of God as a righteous being, that is, a God who acts and judges in accordance with human norms and values. He had pictured the order of God's creation as an order which human beings can comprehend with the help of tradition. Job now perceives that this order, this creation, cannot be comprehended; on the contrary, it overwhelms and subdues him. He reproaches God for acting with sheer arbitrariness or חנם, but realizes for the first time that his own ideas or image might be חנם, purely arbitrary. This is a new insight for him.[1] However, he has not yet worked things out entirely. He continues to ask questions but gradually gives up hope of making any progress through the dialogues with his friends. Eventually Job refuses to

1. Van Wolde, *Meneer en Mevrouw Job*, pp. 72-73.

speak with his friends; he only wants to hear a reaction from YHWH.

The Third Phase in Job's Development: YHWH's Speech and Job's First Response (Job 37–41)

YHWH answers Job out of the whirlwind (Job 37–38). For his response to Job he chooses the arena of creation rather than the Hall of Justice, even though Job has repeatedly requested that in the dialogue.[1] Here YHWH presents a radically different image of creation and justice than Job has expected. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible human beings are considered the pinnacle of creation, meant to rule over nature. This accounts for the fact that there is so little poetry celebrating nature in the Hebrew Bible: the world of nature in itself is of little significance; it is only considered when people are involved. YHWH shows that nature in itself is precious and that human beings are not located at the centre but, rather, at the margin of this natural world.[2] YHWH presents a picture of creation in which there is nothing to indicate the kind of moral order which people would so much like to see. YHWH introduces animals that devour other animals and scavenger birds who feed their young. He thus shows Job that in creation good as well as bad, life as well as death, violence as well peacefulness, co-exist side by side; and that nature does not know a sure reward for good deeds or punishment of bad deeds. In his picture of creation YHWH does

1. YHWH does explicitly react to the previous monologues and dialogues, as expressed in the use of the same words and images; however, in the context of YHWH's speech they function differently; see R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), pp. 85-110.

2. Usually this is interpreted as an image of creation that is at right angles to that of Gen. 1–3, where creation is said to culminate in humanity (Gen. 1.27-28) and the earth is subordinate to it (Gen. 2–3). However, closer study reveals that also in Gen. 1–3, and even in the entire Primeval History (Gen. 1–11), the central point is not so much humanity in its relation to God (as is usually assumed), but rather the *earth* in its relation to God (see E. van Wolde, *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11* [Biblical Interpretation, 6; Leiden: Brill, 1994]).

not mention human beings. Humanity, which regards itself as the centre of the universe, and thinks to impose its own idea of order on this universe, turns out to be no more than a marginal phenomenon within this framework. And this humanity wants to impose its order on him, YHWH, and summon YHWH to reward and punish in accordance with human principles of good and evil? The ironical questions out of the storm completely overturn the notion of and belief in a world based on retribution.

YHWH's voice from the storm blows everything down. The following passage shows how different his view is:

> Who cut a channel for the torrents,
> and a path for the thunderstorms,
> to rain down on the uninhabited land
> on the wilderness where no humans are,
> to saturate the desolate desert
> and make the crop of grass sprout forth? (38.25-27).

YHWH describes the rain, as if to say, Mark this, Job, precious rain, which people are crying out for, is wasted on land where no human being lives and where no one can live. Rain, generally used in the Bible as a metaphor for reward and punishment, bestowed in case of good deeds and denied in case of bad deeds, is not a symbol for morality at all. YHWH does not mention rain that falls equally on inhabited and uninhabited land. On the contrary, three times he refers to rain falling on uninhabited land, wilderness and desolate areas; not once does he allude to rain falling on inhabited land. Is there a way for saying more emphatically that for him ethical categories of reward and punishment have nothing to do with the (continuing existence of) creation? This is YHWH's dispute with Job: not only in creation but also with regard to moral categories humanity, from YHWH's point of view, is marginal.

Job, who has been speaking a great deal all this while, reacts to this thundering violence of YHWH's speech by laying his hand on his mouth and saying that he can speak no more (40.3-5). Having been confronted with creation and briefly enabled to have a glimpse of the great cosmic design, Job states that he has nothing more to say. YHWH continues in chs. 40–41. He introduces extensive descriptions of the two monsters of chaos, Leviathan and Behemoth, and shows that in addition to

creation, chaos continues to exist, order remains next to disorder. And Job cannot judge the foundations and cornerstones on which order is based; he is not familiar with the blueprint of creation. Why should he presume, then, that moral concepts, or the idea of justice that he has used, are at the core of YHWH's design? YHWH created nature, but it proves to contain violence; destruction is an inseparable part of creation. Good and bad, justice and injustice are all fundamental factors in the world: the sun shines alike on sinners *and* on virtuous people, on good and on bad people. There is no retribution such as people would wish. Justice has not been woven into the pattern of the world, nor is YHWH responsible for its administration. It is an ideal that must be realized by people within their society, by themselves and for themselves, and that should not be charged to YHWH's account.

The Fourth Phase in Job's Development: Job's Reply in 42.1-5

In 42.1-6 Job responds at length to YHWH's speech. His reply is an outstanding example of the development which he has undergone as a result of YHWH's words. We will therefore analyse Job's answer in detail.

Job starts his response with, 'I know that you can do everything, that from you can be held back no plan' (42.2). Both parts of this verse admit YHWH's omnipotence and autonomy; what is in the affirmative in the first clause is in the negative in the second clause. מזמה indicates a plan that can have a positive or negative colouring independently of the context;[1] because it functions in 42.2b as parallel to 'everything' in 2a, מזמה therefore points to any 'plan', both good and bad. This word is combined with בצר, 'to cut off, make inaccessible',[2] and with the negative

1. S. Steingrimsson in *ThWAT*, II, pp. 599-603: 'Die Verwendung des Verbs זמם ergibt ein ziemlich einheitliches Bild. Das Verb ist der Bedeutung nach weder negativ noch positiv, die Art der Handlung wird durch das Objekt oder andere hinzugefügte Wörter bestimmt. מזמה: die negative Bedeutung...liegt nicht im Worte selbst, sondern ergibt sich aus dem Kontext'.

2. BDB, p. 130; *HALAT*, p. 142: 'metaph. abgeschnitten sein; ni. unzugänglich, unmöglich sein; pi. unzugänglich machen'.

לא: YHWH cannot be cut off from any plan. One could conclude that מזמה represents YHWH's plan as people experience it: it is YHWH's omnipotence that is boundless and which may turn out well or badly for people.

The next verse (3a) in Job's response refers to YHWH's speech. It describes the activity of human beings as עלם, which could refer to 'hide' as well as 'restrict':[1] the human is the one who restricts an עצה, 'advice' or 'plan'. Since עצה is connected with עצר, 'shut',[2] it is likely that עצה also has the connotation of a plan that has already been decided upon, devised or 'arranged'. The contextual connection of עצה with עלם in v. 3a, where both words refer to 'enclose' and 'restrict', generates a layer of meaning that emphasizes the limiting, restricting activity of humans, which is based on no knowledge whatsoever. While Job describes YHWH as someone who cannot be held back from anything, YHWH describes creatures who want to restrict and enclose everything. Job draws his conclusion (presented by לכן) from these two discoveries in verse 3aβ. Now that he has seen that humans in fact try to subject everything to their own narrow view, he realizes that he has also spoken without any insight. From now on he recognizes that for him everything is נפלאות. נפלאות, a *niphal qotel* (participle) of פלא, indicates a phenomenon that is 'different', 'remarkable' and 'incomprehensible'; in this situation the point of view is not so much the characteristics of the object, but the comprehension and expectations of humans.[3] נפלאות are

1. G. Gerleman, 'Die sperrende Grenze: Die Wurzel 'lm im Hebräischen', *ZAW* 91 (1979), pp. 338-49, explains in an interesting article about the noun עלם that it indicates a 'restriction', 'barrier', 'obstruction' in a spatial sense: 'Eine semasiologische Analyse des Wortes עלם zeigt, daß es zum Sinnbereich des "Sperrens" gehört und "Grenze", "Sperre" meint...so weit das Auge reicht'.

2. BDB, p. 781; GKC, p. 610.

3. See J. Conrad in *ThWAT*, VI, pp. 570-71: 'Bei den Belegen geht es stets um Sachverhalte, die für den Menschen unbegreiflich sind, also sein Erkenntnis- und Vorstellungsvermögen übersteigen... Es ist aber zu beachten, daß die Wortgruppe פלא nicht das Wirken oder Wirksamwerden als solches wiedergibt, sondern es als für Menschen unbegreiflich oder undurchführbar qualifiziert'. See also R. Albertz, *THAT*, II, pp. 413-20: 'Die Wurzel פלא/פלה bezeichnet in der großen Hauptgruppe ihres Vorkommens ein Geschehen, das einem Menschen

those affairs in the face of which a person experiences his or her own limitations; that is also why this *niphal* construction is often combined with מן, to indicate a comparative relation: in relation to a particular human being (and here the first-person narrator is Job) something is too wonderful, impressive and elusive. By looking together with YHWH Job discovers that, from YHWH's perspective, people are busy trying to reduce the unlimited and elusive plan to an עצה which they can apprehend. On the basis of this insight Job decides to acknowledge the unlimited as such, and to appreciate as נפלאות the phenomena that are beyond his horizon.

This completes the first part of Job's reply. In the second part, vv. 4-5, Job quotes YHWH again. He even relinquishes his referential point of view to YHWH: the personal pronoun אנכי, 'I', and the verb form אדברה refer to YHWH himself, even if Job is speaking. Actually, the content of v. 4, 'listen and I will tell you: I will ask you and you will make me know' is the most accurate and pregnant summary of YHWH's speech. First of all YHWH himself begins his speech twice in the same way, and also, within the speech, there is a succession of questions that YHWH asks Job and which Job must answer. Moreover, the ironical answer is already implied: Oh, you can't give the answers, well, you'd better listen then. The game of role reversal—who knows and who does not know, who asks and who makes known, who must listen—has apparently been played long beforehand. It is this game that Job is referring to. In that sense v. 4 superbly summarizes this game in YHWH's speech.

The reaction to YHWH's speech(es) and the question-and-answer game, which vv. 3 and 4 refer to, is given by Job in v. 5 (and v. 6). In v. 5 Job says, 'I have heard you with my ears and now my eye sees you'. Since many exegetes leave v. 4a out of

gemessen an dem, was er gewohnt ist und erwartet hat, außergewöhnlich, unmöglich, eben wunderbar erscheint. פלא hängt nie am Phantomen als solchem, sondern umfaßt sowohl das unerwartete Geschehen als auch die staunende Reaktion des Menschen darauf... In schmalen "profanen" Sprachgebrauch begegnet vor allem, aber keineswegs auf ihn beschränkt, eine eigenartige komparativische Konstruktion mit פלא ni. Hier tritt ganz der Aspekt menschlichen Begrenzseins in den Vordergrund.'

consideration, they get into trouble with the 'seeing' of v. 5. If v. 4a is understood as signifying a change in Job's point of view, then the 'seeing' of v. 5b can be accounted for. By referring in his answer to those opening questions and hence to YHWH's entire speech, and by relinquishing his referential point of view in v. 4, Job makes his transformation visible: he has in fact changed his point of view, but not in knowledge or understanding. It is through a quotation in v. 3a that Job intimates that he has briefly seen with YHWH's eyes; and discovered that from YHWH's perspective all human meddling looks like an immensely narrowing activity in which the entire plan is reduced to small chunks that are easily manageable for human beings. When Job has 'seen' this, he can begin to recognize that for him the plan is נפלאות, affairs that are beyond his scope. That is also why he can neither pass a moral judgment on, nor does he need to search for the morality of, YHWH's managing plan or purpose concerning the world. The words from the whirlwind have profoundly transformed Job's orientation on YHWH and the world.

The Fifth Phase in Job's Development: Job's Reversal in 42.6

The change in insight brought about by YHWH's speech, and the altered (point of) view Job displays in vv. 1-5, generate a transformation of attitude in v. 6:

על כן אמאס
ונחמתי על עפר ואפר

Almost every word in this verse raises questions, resulting in a large amount of literature in which diverse answers are given.[1]

1. L.J. Kuyper, 'The Repentance of Job', *VT* 9 (1959), pp. 91-94; G. Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT, 16; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963), pp. 531-36; D. Patrick, 'The Translation of Job XLII 6', *VT* 26 (1976), pp. 369-71; P.A.H. de Boer, 'Haalt Job bakzeil? (Job xlii 6)', *NedTTs* 31 (1977), pp. 181-94; *idem*, 'Does Job Retract?', in C. van Duin (ed.), *Selected Studies in Old Testament Exegesis* (OTS; 27; Leiden: Brill, 1991); L.J. Kaplan, 'Maimonides, Dale Patrick, and Job LXII 6', *VT* 28 (1978), pp. 356-57; R. Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1978), p. 573; J.B. Curtis, 'On Job's Response to Yahweh', *JBL* 98.4 (1979), pp. 497-511; D.J. O'Connor, 'Job's Final Word—I am Consoled... (42:6b)', *ITQ* 50

The first questions relate to the word אמאס, which indicates a change in attitude involving a rejection of what happened beforehand.[1] Whether one translates this with 'reject' or 'repudiate' or 'despise' largely depends on the way the syntagmatic relations in v. 6 are evaluated. A problem is caused by the fact that מאס is usually a transitive verb and should therefore be accompanied by a direct object, while v. 6a contains no object.[2] Many different views show to what extent an ellipsis may give rise to extremely divergent meanings.[3] Theoretically there are

(1984), pp. 181-94; Habel, *Job*, pp. 576-78; W. Morrow, 'Consolation, Rejection and Repentance in Job 42:6', *JBL* 105.2 (1986), pp. 211-25; Hartley, *The Book of Job*, p. 537; C. Muenchow, 'Dust and Dirt in Job 42:6', *JBL* 108.4 (1989), pp. 597-611; D. Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence: The Book of Job* (Ottawa: St Paul Publications, 1990), pp. 108-10; Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, pp. 375-78; L.G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991), pp. 236-37.

1. The following translations of אמאס are given: 'I repent' (Kuyper, 'The Repentance of Job'); 'I retract' (Habel, *Job*), 'I repudiate' (Patrick, 'Translation'); 'I reject, I despise or I have enough of' (de Boer, 'Does Job Retract?'); 'I despise' (Good, *In Turns of Tempest*); 'I despise' (RSV); 'I abase myself' (Hartley, *The Book of Job*); 'I feel loathing contempt' (Curtis, 'Job's Response'); 'I repent' (JPSV).

2. Cf. Morrow, 'Consolation', p. 214: 'With four exceptions (Job 7:16; 34:33; 36:5; 42:6), the object is always indicated (sixty-six times)'.

3. According to Kuyper, 'The Repentance of Job', v. 3 is the object belonging to אמאס. Hartley (*The Book of Job*, p. 537) assumes that the verb is used reflexively so that 'myself' is the implicit object ('I abase myself'). On the basis of the broader context Habel (*Job*, p. 576) thinks that the implicit object is Job's case against God which Job 'dismisses' or 'retracts'. Morrow ('Consolation') sees three possibilities: the implicit object of אמאס might either be what happened before generally, or 'it' (an implied object in v. 5), or עפר ואפר: extending the ambiguity of v. 6, imposed by the choice between מאס I or מאס II, with the choice of three different objects, 'an ambiguity that has been deliberately structured into 42:6 by the Joban author'. There are also a number of exegetes who are of the opinion that עפר ואפר in 6b, which grammatically belongs to נחם, is also the object of אמאס (Patrick, 'Translation', p. 369; de Boer, 'Does Job Retract', p. 193; Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, p. 237; Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 376). According to de Boer, for example, the verb ונחמתי in the *waw-qatal* continues the action of the first verb (אמאס) in the *yiqtol;* both verbs are closely connected and have עפר ואפר as a joint direct object.

two possibilities: one can fill in the ellipsis, or leave it open. If the first option is chosen, then עפר ואפר as an object of מאס is a good possibility, because it takes the succession of the verb forms seriously, and renders the double duty of עפר ואפר as direct object plausible. Possibly, the *athnach* between נחם and על supports this view. One can also choose the second option, and have מאס function without a direct object. For the time being I would like to leave both options open.

The second verb in v. 6, נחם, is possibly even more problematic than the first one.This word has many divergent meanings, both in the *piel* and the *niphal*.[1] Moreover, it is not clear whether the word נחם on its own is involved here, or whether נחם על should be considered as a unit. De Boer[2] states that נחם על occurs seventeen times in the Hebrew Bible, thirteen times with God as subject and four times with people as subject. The latter instances are: David who goes out of mourning after Amnon's death (2 Sam. 13.39); Rachel who refuses to resign herself to the loss of her

Thus, Good defines עפר ואפר as a double duty object, since this syntagm acts as direct object to נחם על and אמאס.

1. Simian-Yofre describes נחם (*ThWAT*, V, pp. 366-84) and starts by saying that many dictionaries and commentaries have many different translations for it. For נחם *niphal*—'to be(come) sorrowful, rue, regret, hurt, feel pain, feel sorry, feel compassion, feel comfort, be comforted, give comfort'. For נחם *piel*—'to feel compassion for someone, comfort, have mercy on someone, repay, revenge, reinforce, diminish the pain of someone'. Consequently, the word נחם reflects, according to the dictionaries, different and even opposite meanings. Simian-Yofre himself concludes that the general basis of נחם in the Old Testament is not only the emotion or emotional affect, but also the decision and its effect. For Job 42.6 this could mean that Job expresses his regrets or decides to change things. H. van Dyke Parunak ('A Semantic Survey of NḤM', *Bib* 56 [1975], pp. 519-21) presents a study of נחם as used in the Hebrew Bible in various syntactic contexts. A survey of the 53 occurrences of נחם in the *piel* and *pual* favors their uniform translation as 'comfort' or 'console'. A survey of the *niphal* and *hithpael* forms show a more complex use. He gives basic meanings for נחם *niphal* and *hithpael* as: 'suffer emotional pain', 'be comforted, comfort oneself', 'execute wrath', 'retract punishment', 'retract blessing', 'retract (a life of) sin'; then he arranges these meanings into one system, in which 'comfort' and 'compassion' form the basic sense.

2. De Boer, 'Does Job Retract?', pp. 179-95.

children (Jer. 31.15); Pharaoh who resigns himself to his defeat (Exod. 32.13); and the survivors who comfort themselves over the disaster that hit them (Ezek. 14.22).

> One goes into and out of mourning. To go out of it and consider the period of mourning as closed is not the same as being compensated for or denying the loss one has suffered: it means to live on, to turn a new page in the book of one's life. נחם pi., 'to comfort', always implies the opening of a new perspective, while נחם ni, 'to comfort oneself', 'to be consoled', refers to one's living on with what has struck one and to a new future in spite of it... Job feels no remorse, but he bears his cross and is given the perspective of a new life.[1]

Patrick proposed something similar.[2] In his view the basic meaning of נחם is 'to change one's mind', 'to reverse a decision', so that the meaning of נחם על is 'to change one's mind about something one had planned to do'.[3]

> On the analogy to the meaning of נחם על elsewhere, our passage should be translated 'I repent of dust and ashes', that is, cease wallowing in dust and ashes. Job will remove himself from the physical setting associated with mourning and lamentation and cease what he has been doing from 2.8.[4]

1. De Boer, 'Does Job Retract?', p. 192.
2. As appears from Kaplan ('Maimonides, Dale Patrick, and Job XLII 6'), neither de Boer nor Patrick ('Translation') were the first exegetes with this view, since Maimonides held it before them.
3. Patrick ('Translation') mentions: Exod. 32.12, 14; Jer. 18.8, 10; Amos 7.3, 6; Joel 2.13; Jon. 3.10, 4.2 for נחם without על, and 2 Sam. 24.16; 1 Chron. 21.15 (with אל), Jer. 26.3, 13, 19; 42.10 for נחם with על.
4. Partick, 'Translation', p. 370. Habel (*Job*) shares Patrick's view on נחם על in the sense of 'change one's mind' but is of the opinion that this means, together with אמאס, that Job withdraws his action against God. Good (*In Turns of Tempest*) also agrees with Patrick and concludes that in 42.6 Job 'repents his repentance'. Morrow ('Consolation') also sees Patrick's view as a possibility: 'It is conceivable, therefore, that in 42:6 Job may either console himself for, or leave off, dust and ashes. By the same token the concept of "repentance" may also be implied in 42:6 as an extension of the use of נחם to denote the retraction of a previous action. It is clear that נחם can be used absolutely in contexts that call for the idea of decision reversal. In a context in which other indications of penitence are found, the appropriate nuance of decision reversal connoted by נחם would be repentance' (p. 216).

The third word group in verse 6, namely עפר ואפר, also allows more than one interpretation.

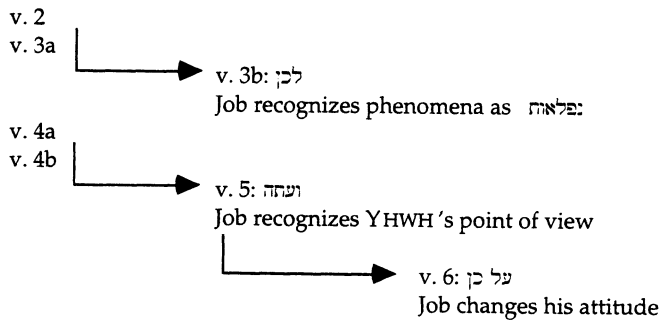
> In Job עפר may mean 'dust' sprinkled upon the head in a lament ritual (Job 2.12), 'mortality/death/the grave' (Job 4.19; 7.5, 21; 10.9), the 'earth' (Job 8.19; 30.6), or 'soil' (Job 22.24; 39.14), while אפר may mean 'ash-heap' (Job 2.8) or indicate 'worthlessness' (Job 13.12).[1]

The only other occurrences of the combination עפר ואפר are in Gen. 18.27 and Ezek. 27.30 (with some words between עפר and אפר), functioning in a context of mourning too.

In order to make a decision about these polyvalent words in v. 6, one should take into consideration the relationship of this verse with the context of vv. 1-6. Job begins his discourse in vv. 2 and 3 with an account of the first change he experiences. First, he states that he knows that YHWH can do everything and can be prevented from nothing (42.2). Next, he relates how he discovers through YHWH's speech that humans in fact try to subject everything to their own narrow view and to reduce it to proportions discernible by human comprehension (42.3aα). Consequently (לכן), he realizes that he too has spoken without any insight and recognizes that for him everything is נפלאות: the order of things is beyond his comprehension. The relationship between Job and the phenomena of the world is hereby established: for him, everything is fundamentally elusive. Job continues his discourse in vv. 4-5 with a description of the second change he experiences. First he refers to YHWH's speech, surrenders his own perspective to YHWH's, and shows that not he but YHWH devises the referential framework (42.4a). In a quotation of YHWH (who speaks in the first person) Job subsequently summarizes the situation as a game of question-and-answer in which those who know and those who do not know exchanged places (42.4b). Finally Job expresses his reaction: 'now (ועתה) I see you'. Job has seen YHWH's view. To summarize, while Job has began to see world phenomena differently through the first transformation, namely as נפלאות, he begins to see YHWH differently through the second transformation. In the closing v. 6 Job draws his conclusion on the basis of the two transformations

1. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, p. 237 n. 3.

he has undergone. This is indicated by the word על-כן which, even more than לכן, marks the causal relation between what transpired beforehand and what follows: the clause which follows על-כן contains Job's final conclusion in its entirety. It expresses Job's perception, which is caused by the insights gleaned from YHWH's speech and reflected in vv. 2-3 and 4-5. Here it is no longer a question of a change in insight but, rather, a change of *attitude* which is indicated by the verbs מאס and נחם. Schematically illustrated, the structure of vv. 2-6 is as follows.



Various correspondences and oppositions also occur within these three sections. While v. 3 indicates actions in the past, as shown by לכן followed by a *qatal* and two *w^{e}-x-yiqtol* forms, v. 5 introduces an action in the present by means of the word ועתה: '*now* I see you'. The conclusion which follows in v. 6 (על-כן) is presented by a *yiqtol* and a *w^{e}-qatal* forms, which span present and future.

The content of this final conclusion of Job's hangs on the verbs מאס and נחם in v. 6. Assuming the more or less generally accepted view that מאס derives from מאס I, which indicates a change in attitude and a rejection of previous things, and that נחם *niphal* means 'to change one's mind' with the connotation of 'comfort, console', one can conclude that both verbs together designate a change in attitude involving a rejection with regard to the past. As a result of the ambiguity due to the absence of a direct object to מאס (to come back to the question left open above), two meanings are possible. Either מאס is considered a verb without an object, or עפר ואפר is the direct object to both מאס and נחם. In the first case the lack of a direct object can be regarded as meaningful: this ellipsis could represent the events

and words, attitude and point of view of the past; all this has become 'empty'. It no longer has any content and belongs to Job's past. In the second case, with עפר ואפר as the implicit object of אמאס and the explicit object of נחם, the second verb supplements the first activity: Job changes with regard to his situation of dust and ashes, he repudiates dust and ashes.

A further determination of the meaning of נחם involves some other considerations. The first is the Masoretic interpunction. An *athnach* indicates that the words נחם and על are separated, which could be interpreted as a sign of the double duty of עפר ואפר. In this option the *athnach* is employed to indicate that עפר ואפר functions as a direct object to both verbs. The syntagmatic context of 42.1-6 supports this construction, as shown by the parallel in the structures of vv. 3 and 6: in v. 3 נפלאות functions (implicitly) as a double duty object to לא אבין ('I do not understand') and לא אדע ('I do not know'). Similarly, in v. 6 עפר ואפר occurs as a double duty object to אמאס and ונחמתי. On the basis of these arguments, a choice for the connection of נחם with the preposition על can be made. In determining the meaning of this phrase, intertextual data about נחם על in the Hebrew Bible are illuminating. Four out of the seventeen occurrences of this combination have 'people' as subject, and in all these cases נחם על points to a context of self-comforting after a period of mourning. Therefore, one may conclude that in 42.6 נחם על indicates that Job closes his period of mourning. In the same way, as vv. 2 and 3 reflect a change in Job's attitude with regard to phenomena, and vv. 4 and 5 show a change in Job's point of view with regard to YHWH, v. 6 indicates a change in attitude: by אמאס, Job indicates that he turns away from the old, and by נחם על that he turns toward a new future. It is hard to capture all these nuances and connotations in one translation. We shall have to settle for translating v. 6 as: 'Therefore I turn away from/repudiate and comfort myself /repent of dust and ashes'.

In summary, one could state that Job 42.1-6 portrays the reversal which takes place inside Job. Through YHWH's speech and the question-and-answer game that is central to it, through undergoing the experience of YHWH's continuous reversal of roles between himself and Job, Job can detach himself from his own referential point of view and begin to see through different

eyes. As a result Job undergoes two transformations: he discovers that most things are beyond his scope, that he neither has nor could have insight into the masterplan of creation; and he briefly recognizes YHWH's way of seeing. Because Job's view changes, there can also be a reversal in his attitude: Job turns away from what is past towards the future.

A FEMINIST APPROACH TO THE BOOK OF JOB

Lyn M. Bechtel

The book of Job has long fascinated and distressed people. Many scholars expect the primary focus of the book to be the vindication of God for allowing the existence of suffering and evil.[1] With this expectation, when God finally answers Job in chs. 38–42, there is disappointment since no vindication occurs. Consequently, some scholars have concluded that God says nothing and that God's zoo full of animals is irrelevant to Job's question;[2] or, that the book presents God as a capricious, chaotic and

1. See M.B. Crook, *The Cruel God* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 1183-84; M.V. Fox, 'Job 38 and God's Rhetoric', *Semeia* 19 (1981), pp. 53-61; R. Gordis, *The Book of Job* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), p. 560; O. Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Hiob* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), pp. 156-57; V. Kubina, *Die Gottesreden im Buch Hiob* (Freiburg: Herder, 1979), pp. 143-58; H.D. Preuss, 'Jahwes Antwort an Hiob und die sogenannte Hiobliteratur des alten Vorderen Orients', in H. Donner *et al.* (eds.), *Beitrage zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), pp. 338-42; E.M. Good, 'The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job', in L.G. Perdue and W.C. Gilpin (eds.), *The Voice from the Whirlwind* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), pp. 50-69.

2. See L.G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt* (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1991). Robert Polzin (*Biblical Structuralism* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press/Scholars Press, 1979], p. 105) feels that God's power play tells Job nothing that he does not already know. Compare to N.C. Habel ('In Defense of God the Sage', in Perdue and Gilpin [eds.], *The Voice from the Whirlwind*, pp. 21-38), who feels that God does not answer Job's question, but shows the design of the world to be one of 'rhythms and paradoxes, of balanced opposites and controlled extremes, of mysterious order and ever-changing patterns, of freedom and limits, of life and death' (p. 38).

jealous tyrant who abuses power;[1] or, that God simply stresses the limited knowledge of humanity, which prevents them from being capable of understanding his transcendent, all-controlling nature.[2] But this expectation of theodicy may be off-base. Instead, the story may present a forum in which Job's suffering simply becomes the setting for the main thrust of the book: namely, Job's struggle with and questioning of the relevance of the 'deuteronomic theology'[3] (see below), to which he and his friends seem to cling tenaciously.

A Paradigm for Understanding the Book of Job

To help illuminate this understanding of the book of Job and particularly God's answer to Job, I am proposing a feminist paradigm that is grounded on both ancient religious and modern non-religious sources. It is an expansion and synthesis of the fundamental insights that lie behind the ancient 'myth of the goddess' in the ancient Near East, in which the basic principles of creation and nature are expressed through the various symbolic images of goddesses and gods.[4] These same basic

1. See J.B. Curtis, 'On Job's Response to Yahweh', *JBL* 98 (1979), pp. 495-511; D. Robertson, 'The Book of Job: A Literary Study', *Soundings* 56 (1973), pp. 446-69; J. Williams, '"You Have Not Spoken Truth of Me": Mystery and Irony in Job', *ZAW* 83 (1971), pp. 231-55.

2. See M. Burrows, 'The Voice from the Whirlwind', *JBL* 47 (1928), pp. 117-32; J.L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), pp. 110-25; E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (Leiden: Brill, 1967); J. Hempel, 'Das theologische Problem des Hiob', in *Apoxysmata* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1961), pp. 114-73.

3. I am calling it 'deuteronomic theology' for simplicity's sake. It is found in the book of Deuteronomy, the deuteronomic tradition (Joshua through 2 Kings), in the book of Psalms and Proverbs. Many of the prophets represent this theology (for example 1 Isaiah, Jeremiah, 2 Isaiah, Habakkuk, Malachi). It appears that deuteronomic theologians have edited the prophetic corpus, so that their theology has been redacted into any prophets not thoroughly grounded in deuteronomic theology.

4. For a thorough presentation of the myth of the goddess, see A. Baring and J. Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (London: Arkana/Penguin Books, 1991). See also W.W. Hallo, and J.J.A. Van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968); T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A*

principles have been laid out in the new science of complexity,[1] the scientific theory of chaos[2] and, in part, the work of the Pulitzer prize-winning cultural anthropologist, Ernest Becker.[3] Interestingly, these insights gleaned from modern science and ancient myth are nowhere to be found within modern Judaeo-Christian (patriarchal) theology, where there is no feminine dimension to the divine. Instead, there is only a masculine God who transcends creation and controls it absolutely. This theology of an all-controlling God is grounded on the principles of deuteronomic theology, which tends to create an unrealistic vision of God and God's dealing with creation. In contrast, the theology behind the book of Job has incorporated the basic insights of the myth of the goddess into its version of Yahwism (although without the goddess) and has challenged the validity of deuteronomic theology.

The paradigm I am presenting is 'feminist' because it is grounded on the insights of the myth of the goddess and, most of all, because it articulates the fundamental principles inherent in creation and tries to correct the patriarchal tendency to eliminate or overcome those principles. The paradigm is offered with caution, acknowledging that it is a radical oversimplification of an immensely complex and subtle process.

History of Mesopotamian Religion (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976); S. Langdon, *Tammuz and Ishtar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914); R. Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 3rd edn, 1990).

1. M.M. Waldrop, *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1992).

2. J. Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin, 1987).

3. E.E. Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Problem of Man* (New York: Free Press, 1971); *idem*, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973); *idem*, *Escape from Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1975). It is interesting to note that Alan Watts (*The Book: On the Taboo against Knowing Who You Are* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1966], pp. 32-35) draws many of the same conclusions because of his extensive study of eastern religions, particularly Zen Buddhism.

The Paradigm

The most basic thing that can be said about life or creation is that it exists in the complex, creative interfacing of oppositional forces. The most fundamental of these forces are life and death, control and arbitrariness, power and impotence, order and disorder, prosperity and deprivation, potential and limitation, unity and separation. Although these forces are oppositional and differentiated, they are unified in one continuous process.[1] They are a 'differentiated unity'.[2] Because of the unity, the elimination of one oppositional force also eliminates the other—that is, if death is eliminated life is also eliminated. One species eats another to live, so if death is eliminated so is eating and life. Or vegetation grows, decays and dies in order to create soil to grow more vegetation, more life. Death is critical to life.

To substantiate this concept of a differentiated unity, physicists, beginning with Heisenberg and Einstein, have shown that in sub-atomic physics all matter is the same.[3] There is no differentiation of oppositional forces, no differentiation between life and death, no interfacing, opposition or contradiction. On a sub-atomic level, rocks and rabbits are composed of the same matter. In essence, then, life and death are a unity. It is only when matter comes together in infinite and complex combinations that there is differentiation (but not separation), particularly differentiation of life molecules.[4] It is at this level

1. It is interesting that in ancient religions the goddess symbolizes a continuous process of life and death, permanence and change, sexuality and renewal. In goddess religions birth and death are equivalent and mutually supportive aspects of existence. In these religions for life to proceed and renew itself, it must also be destroyed. Death is loss of vitality, but it is also creative and renewing. But we call this 'primitive' thinking. See Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*. See also Watts for a similar formulation in *The Book*.

2. Compare to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of differentiation and integration in *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), p. 41.

3. Also pointed out by Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*, p. xiii.

4. J. Franklin, *Molecules of the Mind: The Brave New Science of Molecular Psychology* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1987), pp. 43-45. Cf.

that the principle of a 'differentiated unity' begins.

The human psyche provides an example of differentiated unity. Human beings have an instinct for self-preservation which is necessary for 'life' and simultaneously a competing cognitive awareness of 'death'. Instinctively humans seek life and avoid death, yet they have the cognitive capacity to know that life cannot exist without death, that life feeds on death, that life lives on death. Death is such a fundamental part of life that even though life and death are differentiated they are a unity, inexorably intertwined in one continuous, complex process.[1] This awareness of death contradicts, struggles with, and yet interfaces with the instinct for life. Because of the contradiction and struggle, Becker calls the process 'the paradox of the human condition'.[2]

Since human beings have the capacity to experience and cognitively understand and reflect on these foundational principles, religion and theology should provide an imaginative construction of the divine reality that embraces these principles and provides a way of coping with their complexity. The ancient goddess provides such a construct. Goddesses, such as Ishtar and Inanna, represent this differentiated unity in that they are both the power of life/sexual love/productivity of the earth and the power of death/virginity/barrenness of the earth simultaneously. Or the intimate relationship between life and death is expressed in Inanna, the goddess of life, and her sister, Ereshkigal, goddess of death.

On of the most important aspects of this differentiated unity is the fact that the interaction between the oppositional forces is determined by control and arbitrariness (lack of control or

Gleick, *Chaos*; V. Sutton, *The Particle Connection* (New York: Touchstone, 1984).

1. See Watts, *The Book*.

2. Georg Fohrer (*Das Buch Hiob* [Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963], p. 500) suggests somewhat the same thing in his analysis of the book of Job, but concludes that the 'paradox' of existence can be overcome by community with God. In contrast, Fox ('Job 38 and God's Rhetoric', pp. 53-61), Gordis (*Job*, p. 560), Keel (*Hiob*, pp. 156-57) and Kubina (*Hiob*, pp. 143-58) maintain that God sustains justice in creation and in history.

randomness). Modern science now realizes that the arbitrary and random elements in the structure of creation are as essential to its overall functioning as the regulating elements, so again arbitrariness cannot be eliminated for the sake of control. Since control and arbitrariness are vital principles of creation, they are symbolized in such goddesses as Nammu, the goddess of the sea, who combines chaotic arbitrariness and the control of the tides. Control and arbitrariness are seen in Inanna as the goddess of the moon with its regular cycles; and Inanna as the goddess of the storm with its unpredictable, arbitrary, destructive powers that can also be fertilizing and life-renewing. Or Anat is portrayed as the bloody goddess of the hunt and war, situations in which the arbitrariness of death is particularly apparent, yet she is also the one who rescues Baal from Mot /death. Or Tiamat, symbolic of chaos and arbitrariness, is portrayed as a foundational principle of creation, so that when Marduk orders and controls creation she is split to form the heavens and earth, suggesting that chaos and arbitrariness are inherently one, together with order and control.

Equally important is the evaluation of the 'worth' or 'value' of the oppositional forces. Because of the unity between the oppositional forces, one polarity is not inherently good and the other inherently bad.[1] It is not the polarities themselves that create either good or bad. Life cannot be categorized as absolutely 'good', something always to be striven for, and death cannot be categorized as absolutely 'bad', something always to be eliminated. Since death threatens the instinct for self-preservation, the psyche reacts and perceives death, or anything that threatens it, as 'bad'. But this is a function of the human psyche, not a problem inherent in the structure of creation; the idea of an inherent principle of evil within creation is a projection from the threatened human psyche. In fact, it is human beings' lack of ability to carefully discern and cope with

1. This is not dualism, which entails the absolute differentiation of oppositional forces without an inherent unity. In contrast, deuteronomic theology operates under the illusion that so-called 'righteous behavior' is only good and not simultaneously good and bad, and so-called 'wicked behavior' is only bad and not simultaneously bad and good.

the differentiated unity of the oppositional forces that creates 'evil', not the oppositional forces themselves. Each of the oppositional forces can be used either destructively or creatively. The responsibility is on humanity, not some outside force.

Potential Reaction to the Dynamics of Life

Although human beings have the capacity to understand and cope with these foundational principles, often theology may treat them in a reactionary manner. Theology may resist the continual change and complexity inherent in the differentiated unity, and appease the instinct for self-preservation, by eliminating arbitrariness and striving for unlimited control of the oppositional forces. But striving for excessive control or control of things that cannot be controlled is an illusion. Its ultimate goal is the elimination of a fundamental principle of creation, and the substitution of a human psychic need for it. This reflects a lack of acceptance of the divine principles of creation. Sharon Welch[1] finds this tendency to be so prevalent in Western patriarchal culture (though it is most often subliminal) that she calls it a pervading 'ethic of control'. Thomas Berry[2] points out that this 'ethic of control' reveals a 'deep hidden rage' against the human condition, against creation and against God. The 'ethic of control' has enticed people to imagine God as completely dissociated from the differentiated unity, transcendent and associated only with things that satisfy human psychic needs, such as power and control. Once the creative tension between oppositional forces and the dynamic of control and arbitrariness have been removed from the domain of God, then humans feel justified in their rejection of these principles and in their adoption of an ethic of control. It is this tendency toward excessive control that characterizes both deuteronomic theology and patriarchy in its most oppressive form.

There are three prevalent means of striving for excessive

1. S. Welch, *The Ethic of Risk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

2. T. Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988); A. Longergan and C. Richards (eds.), 'A New Context for Religious Unity', in *Thomas Berry and the New Cosmology* (Mystic, CT; Twenty-Third Publications, 1988), pp. 27-40.

control relevant to the book of Job. It should be noted that what is problematic is not the arena in which control is carried out, but the process of striving for *excessive control.*

Technology and Civilization

The first example of striving for excessive control is obvious and needs little expansion. It is found in the creation of civilization as a regulating and ordering mechanism which protects people from the arbitrary elements of life.[1] Basically, humans create civilization in order to 'live'.[2] Civilization begins by removing humanity from the arbitrariness of the food chain. Then, the more developed civilization becomes, the more it is capable of providing increasingly sophisticated forms of protection. As a regulating mechanism civilization and its technology can function positively, as long as people do not strive for protection and control—in other words, as long as there is awareness of the essential interfacing between protection and vulnerability, control and arbitrariness. But, as Thomas Berry has pointed out, the industrial world has been built on the illusion of creating a totally controlled 'wonder world' that will provide inordinate abundance and ease—at least for some. Technology has become a means of achieving this regulation and is considered to have unlimited potential. The pathos of the situation is that under the tyranny of this need for excessive control, what is being produced is a paralyzing 'waste world' in which, as the need for control increases, people become more and more cut off from nature, from creation and from God. The crux of the problem is not civilization and technology, but the human expectation of life without an interplay of oppositional forces and without an interplay of control and arbitrariness. In God's answer to Job God will point out this problematic need for excessive control within civilization, a problem which separates people from nature, natural life and, ultimately, God.

1. See Becker, *Denial of Death* and *Escape from Evil* for a fuller explanation.
2. M. Godelier, *The Mental and the Material* (London: Verso, 1988).

Creation of Absolutes: Dualism

A second example of people's striving for excessive control is the creation of separate 'absolutes' or a 'dualism' out of the oppositional forces. Creating absolutes or a dualism eliminates the unity between the polarities and recognizes only the differentiation. It operates under the illusion that such things as arbitrariness, impotence, limitation and deprivation are inherently bad and should be repressed or eliminated completely. Such things as control, power, potential and prosperity are considered completely good and to be sought without restraint. This kind of thinking reveals a lack of discernment and is the source of much human evil. It also reveals the threatened ego's need to reduce the complexity of reality into rigidity and stagnation. And most of all, it encourages people to strive for the illusion of perfection, which places them under the tyranny of the human ego.

A prime example of striving for excessive control through the creation of absolutes or dualism is found in deuteronomic theology. Although it contains many insights and strengths, fundamentally deuteronomic theology is a dualistic theology that is grounded on the assumption of God's absolute control of all aspects of existence, and on the elimination of arbitrariness. Biblical scholars have referred to the core of this theology as divine justice or the doctrine of reward and retribution. It assumes that God completely destroys chaos and arbitrariness, punishes the wicked,[1] and rewards the righteous.[2] Fundamental

1. Eliphaz asserts, 'Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where have the upright (*yāšār*) been destroyed? I have observed that those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed' (4.7-9; cf. 5.12-16; 15.20-35; 22.15-20). Bildad speaks the same theology (see 8.20-22; 18.5-21), as do Zophar (see 11.14-15, 20; 20.5-18, 22-29) and Elihu, whom Carol Newsom ('Cultural Politics and the Reading of Job', *Biblical Interpretation* 1 [1993], p. 132) calls 'a reader who writes himself into the book' (see 36.11-12; 34.24-27; 36.6-10).

2. D.J.A. Clines ('Why is there a Book of Job, and what Does it Do to You if You Read It', paper presented at the 1993 AAR/SBL Annual Meeting in Washington, DC) points out the denial of the doctrine of

to this concept of divine justice is the ego's need for people to get what they deserve.[1] This notion can only function in a totally regulated world without a differentiated unity of oppositional forces and without arbitrariness, ambivalence and ambiguity. Only in a controlled dualistic world can prosperity (considered reward) and deprivation (considered punishment) correlate to behavior. In reality, prosperity and deprivation are generated from either the human economic system or an arbitrary interplay of oppositional forces.[2]

In addition, although this theology projects control onto God, in actuality it is humans who are in control. In the dualistic world imagined by deuteronomic theology, people can choose between absolute righteousness and absolute wickedness. If they choose righteousness, God must reward them with life and prosperity. But if they choose wickedness, God must punish them with adversity and deprivation (for example Deut. 30.15-20). Control is in the hands of the people who do the choosing, and God's functioning is reduced to adhering to a formula that satisfies the human ego.[3]

Feeding the Appetites

A third example of striving for excessive control is the feeding of appetites[4] (that is, the instinct for self-preservation) with

reward, but acknowledges that in the end it appears to win out.

1. In several Socratic dialogues (for example *Gorgias* and *Republic*) Plato discusses the various human perceptions of justice, and concludes that justice cannot exist.

2. This is similar to Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, pp. 110-25; A. Lacocque, 'Job or the Impotence of Religion and Philosophy', *Semeia* 19 (1981), pp. 33-52, who suggest that reality is amoral, that God transcends human ideas of justice and that retribution (I would call it a system of absolute control) is rejected. Cf. A. Brenner, 'God's Answer to Job', *VT* 31 (1981), pp. 129-37, who posits that while God has created evil and acts to constrain it, God's power is limited and cannot eliminate evil.

3. See Deut. 4.25-31; 5.29, 32-33; 6.13, 18; 7.12-15; 8.6, 19; 10.12; 12.28; 19.20; 28.58-68; 32.4; Josh. 1.8; Ps. 25.21; 37.37; Prov. 2.7; 8.13; 10.27; 11.5-6; 12.26; 19.23.

4. See Becker, *Denial of Death* and *Escape from Evil* for a fuller explanation.

significance, prestige, material things and power, far beyond what is needed for basic survival. People strive: (1) to stockpile as much significance and status as possible because there is the hope that significant things are permanent and permanent things continue to live, (2) to stockpile excessive material things with the hope that excessive prosperity is protection against the arbitrary encroachment of death, and (3) to stockpile power because power gives the illusion of control over life and the arbitrary encroachment of death. Feeding the appetites in moderation is necessary for survival but, in excess, it creates the illusion of protection and control; which, again, places people under the tyranny of the human ego.

To return to the book of Job. The character Job is portrayed as a very prosperous, upper-class male who has stockpiled excessively. Stockpiling wealth has also allowed him to stockpile status within his circumscribed community, once again creating the illusion of protection and control, thus placing Job under the tyranny of his own ego. With the loss of these things he loses his illusion of control over life and is devastated. This is the state of affairs at the start of the book's main (poetic) section. Thus, the three types listed of reactions to the principles of God's creation will help illuminate the book of Job as it wrestles with the validity of Job's deuteronomic theology of control.

The Paradigm and the Book of Job

Although Job's deuteronomic theology was used in the ancient world to justify the dominance of a particular group of upper-class, male political/religious leaders, in today's world deuteronomic theology is embraced by many levels of society and particularly in order to undergird patriarchy. From a feminist perspective, then, the struggle reflected in the book of Job is as relevant for the modern world as it was for the ancient world.

The book of Job speaks of and to a wealthy, ruling-class male audience,[1] in a social world where the great disparity between rich and poor is seemingly not regarded as problematic and where humans are listed as the property of a rich man along

1. Clines, 'Why is there a Book of Job', p. 4.

with animals. The full dimension of this social world is revealed slowly as the dialogue proceeds. It is a world in which status relates to wealth and where powerful, rich men dominate over younger, less powerful men and women (29.7-11). Yet all of this internal social conflict and class struggle is quietly suppressed.[1] I assume that the book's audience knows and probably embraces deuteronomic theology and its excessive control, so that in the prologue it requires only an economy of words to portray Job's conventional deuteronomic piety.[2]

Using typical language, Job is described as the epitome of the deuteronomic theology person: he is 'blameless (*tam*) and upright (*yāšār*)',[3] one who fears (*yr'*) Elohim and 'turns away from evil' (1.1, 8; 2.3), carries out his cultic duties meticulously (1.5) and is, therefore, a very rich person: he has seven sons, three daughters, seven thousand male sheep, three thousand female camels, five hundred male oxen, five hundred female asses, and many servants (1.2-3).[4] This description seems to

1. Clines ,'Why is there a Book of Job', pp. 4-11.

2. Newsom, 'Cultural Politics', pp. 119-38. In Ezek. 14.14, 20 Job, Noah and Daniel are archetypal representatives of conventional piety. Athalya Brenner ('Job the Pious? The Characterization of Job in the Narrative Framework of the Book', *JSOT* 43 [1989], p. 37) calls the description 'an ironic exaggeration of the concept of conventional piety'.

3. The terms *tam* and *yāšār*, together or separately, are used throughout the deuteronomic tradition to describe just behavior (for example, 2 Sam. 22, 24–26; 1 Kgs 9.4; and the good deuteronomic kings are the ones who act uprightly [*yāšār*] in the eyes of the Lord [David, 1 Kgs 15.5; Asa, 15.11; Jehosophat, 22.43; Jehoash, 2 Kgs 12.2; Amaziah, 14.3; Azariah, 15.3; Jotham, 15.34; Hezekiah, 18.3; Josiah, 22.2]). Deuteronomic theology also dominates the Psalms and the Proverbs. Psalm 1 lays out the theology: the righteous are like trees planted by streams of water, they prosper. The wicked are like chaff that the wind drives away. God watches over the righteous, but the wicked perish (cf. Ps. 37.37-38). In Prov. 2.20-21 people are admonished to 'walk in the way of good, and keep to the paths of the just. For the upright (*yāšār*) will abide in the land and the blameless (*tam*) will remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the land and the treacherous will be rooted out of it': and cf. Prov. 2.7-8; 10.9; 11.3; 11.6, 20; 13.6; 14.2, 11; 28.10, 18.

4. The *waw* consecutive connecting the 'children', 'animals' and 'servants' to Job's piety indicates that his prosperity is the result of his piety—likewise, with Job's beautiful daughters and their inheritance

suggest Job's psychological need to stockpile excessive material things with the hope of protection against the arbitrary elements of life. If so, Job uses his piety as a control mechanism. This would place him under the tyranny of his own ego, rather than depict his primary motivation as devotion to God. Does the audience simply assume the plausibility of God's rewarding Job with excessive wealth because of his pious behavior and devotion? Or is the description of Job's wealth and piety so extreme that it begins to verge on the absurd and subtly subvert, rather than reinforce, his piety?[1] It will soon become evident that Job's diligent sacrificing on behalf of his children is worthless, since it does not protect them from the arbitrary encroachment of death that comes upon them (1.13-19).

The first encounter with God in the book is set within the divine court (1.6 onwards), which usually portrays a domain of unmitigated control and power—an excellent environment in which to portray a deuteronomic God of absolute control. Even the orderly prose language of the prologue gives the impression of the regulated, ordered world that this theology expects.[2] But immediately the satan, God's district attorney who keeps an eye on the world, watching for disloyalty or falsity,[3] questions whether the motivation behind Job's pious behavior is his expectation of reward and fear of punishment—the audience is not alone in questioning Job's motivation. So, the satan proposes that if God arbitrarily allows Job's excess wealth (but certainly not all of it) to be taken away, Job will curse God—that is, accuse God of injustice.[4] God agrees to examine the situation by trial: at least a portion of Job's wealth is removed by arbitrary elements of human culture (Sabaeans and Chaldaeans) and

(42.15). See Clines, 'Why is there a Book of Job', p. 9.

1. Brenner, 'Job the Pious?', pp. 44-45.
2. Newsom, 'Cultural Politics', p. 122.
3. Newsom, 'Cultural Politics', p. 122.
4. The comment of Leo Perdue expresses well the kind of accusation Job was expected to make: 'God's sentencing Job to this fate was grossly unjust and brought the universe to the brink of oblivion. These foul deeds even raise questions about Yahweh's power... The god who claims to sustain creation and limit the destructive effects of chaos cannot grind righteous men and women into the dust "without cause"'; Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, p. 239.

nature ('fire from heaven', lightning; and a hurricane-like east wind from the desert). In this scene the interplay between control and arbitrariness in God's functioning stands in stark contrast to the assumptions of absolute control by deuteronomic theology. As characteristic of his theology, Job responds to his loss with conventional expressions of grief (tearing his garment and falling on the ground), a standard mourning rite (shaving his head), and lamentation for his undeserved suffering (1.20). Even Job's response is a regulated, ordered one. Next, Job's very life is arbitrarily threatened by a debilitating disease (ch. 2); such a sorry fate is assumed by deuteronomic theology to be an indication of divine punishment for sins committed. While Job clings to his theology of God's absolute control of life, the audience is witness to God's functioning within the arbitrariness of life.

When Job's friends hear of his misfortune, they come to console (*nwd*) and comfort (*nḥm*) him with their own particular versions of deuteronomic theology. The core of the book consists of a long poetic section in which Job and his friends thrash out their perceptions of the causes for suffering—all of which is done within the thought patterns and literary forms of deuteronomic theology. All the friends' assumptions are derived from the notion that God regulates each and every event and does not allow arbitrariness to exist. Only the audience is aware of the importance of arbitrariness in Job's situation. But slowly, as Job struggles for answers, his life experience begins to clash with his theology and he occasionally questions the validity of his theology. It soon becomes evident to the audience that Job's suffering might stem more from his lack of status in his wealth-determined social class[1] (19.2-9; 30.1-31) and from his deuteronomic theology with its unrealistic expectations of life and God, and less from his actual deprivation and disease. It should be noted that, at this juncture, Job does *not* seem to be living in abject poverty. He can still entertain guests in his house (19.15), maintain servants (19.15-16) and a herd of male oxen and female asses (there is no mention of their loss). The pity that he seeks (19.21-22) is for his emotional distress, not for

1. See L. Bechtel, 'Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming', *JSOT* 49 (1991), pp. 72-74.

starvation and complete deprivation.

In contrast to the orderly language of the prose section, Job's struggle for answers is intentionally set in poetry, with strong elements of ambiguity, 'full of rare and difficult words, archaic grammatical forms, elliptical syntax, and subtle intertextual allusions'.[1] This is an ideal context for such a difficult theological struggle: the ambiguity of the language deflects the definitive answers deuteronomic theology expects. But, in this struggle, the characters do not listen to one another. Job and his friends do not respond to each other's questions. Instead, each simply restates the conventional deuteronomic theology in his own words. It seems that each person's thinking is fixated, with no possibility of transformation. It is a dialogue of sound and fury, leading nowhere—except to frustration and exhaustion. This is important to note. Deuteronomic theology offers absolute control and certainty, which precludes transformation (and see the book's epilogue).

Throughout the section, Job struggles with his theology in the face of his arbitrary misfortune and laments his situation utilizing typical literary forms of deuteronomic theology, such as proverbs (for example 1.21; 2.10b; 6.5-6), psalms (for example 7.17-18 [see Ps. 8.4]; 19.1-21 [see Ps. 35]), and prophetic material (for example 3.3-26 [see Jer. 20.14-18]). Although he expresses his doubts about his theology in 9.22-24, he does not begin to seriously doubt his theology before ch. 21, where he asks his friends:

> Why do the wicked live on, reach old age and grow mighty in power? Their children are established in their presence, their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them. Their bull breeds without fail; their cow calves and never miscarries... They spend their days in prosperity and go down to Sheol in peace... How then will you comfort me with empty nothings? There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood (Job 21.7-10, 13, 34; cf. Jer. 12.1).

1. Newsom, 'Cultural Politics', pp. 124-26. Newsom (pp. 120-30) concludes that the book of Job is not a simple prose tale into which a poetry dialogue has been added, but a literary piece intentionally composed in prose and poetry to establish the proper context for wager and the struggle for answers. See also Brenner, 'Job the Pious?', pp. 38-39.

Although Job begins to see the falsehood of deuteronomic theology, he returns to it when he asks where wisdom can be found (Job 28.12-13) and concludes that wisdom is 'Fear of the Lord and turning away from evil' (28.28; 1.1; cf. Prov. 1.7; 3.7; 9.10; 14.6; 16.6). Again, in ch. 31, Job cannot quite let go of the idea of a God of absolute control. But at least he has begin to struggle with and question his traditional dogma.

Eventually, Job asks to encounter God face to face. He asks for a judicial hearing, which in deuteronomic theology is considered a valid way of establishing the veracity of a theological viewpoint (see the lawsuits of Second Isaiah). In his request for a hearing, Job assumes that he has been accused falsely by God and that God has acted unjustly. Within deuteronomic theology questioning the justice of God is blasphemous, so Job is now 'cursing' God. It is interesting to note that God answers Job only when Job's mind has been opened by his serious questioning (though God does not answer through a judicial hearing—a subtle rejection of its veracity).

God's Answer to Job: The Storm

God, responding to Job in poetry rather than concrete, controlled narrative, speaks out of a storm (*sᵉʿārâ*; 38.1; 40.6). Nature is used to symbolize an essential aspect of God's functioning. A storm is part of the natural order, yet it is not part of the predictable elements of nature; it represents a degree of randomness. It is movement, energy, often violence that can bring death. But, simultaneously, a storm frequently contains rain, which produces fertility and renews life. So a storm exists in the creative, dynamic interaction between oppositional forces and places God's functioning squarely in that interaction[1]—similar to the functioning of Inanna.

Creation, the Wild Animals and Natural Control (38.4–39.30)

In God's answer God tries to lead Job away from his 'ethic of

1. Elsewhere in the deuteronomic theology of 2 Isaiah the storm is God's way of destroying the wicked (Isa. 40.24; 41.16).

control' toward a more realistic understanding of God and life.[1] God begins by asking, 'Who is this that obscures (my) design (*ʿēṣâ*) without knowledge?... I will question you, so that you will know me' (38.2-3). Job's deuteronomic theology obscures the divine principles upon which creation is based, principles which Job does not understand. And by asking rhetorical questions of Job, God is forcing him to think and reevaluate his theology. God does not pronounce things authoritatively, but asks questions that guide Job's thinking and allow him the freedom to struggle and grow.

God's answer is set within nature and creation as revelatory of the principles of life and the divine. God begins by presenting the natural control of creation in chs. 38–39 which, when interfaced with the arbitrariness of creation in chs. 40–41, creates a differentiated unity. In ch. 38 God stresses that the natural control of creation is divine control, not human control. Humans, despite their deuteronomic theology, are incapable of achieving (excessive) control of the principles of creation.

In ch. 39, natural control within the life of various wild animals that live free in the wilderness is presented. The wilderness is often considered an uncivilized place, outside the realm of human order and control, a place of arbitrariness, the antithesis of civilization with its potential for excessive control. But God corrects that misunderstanding. God uses the wilderness as a symbol of the dynamic principles of life. For example, in 39.13-18 the ostrich, which humans consider stupid, actually trusts the randomness of life by allowing her eggs to be warmed by the ground and ignoring the threat of a foot that might trample them. She laughs at the horse and rider, a symbol of the domestication of civilization. The ostrich trusts in the natural control and arbitrariness of the wilderness. Job is to learn from an animal.

Next, the horse. The horse can be domesticated and live within civilization; does not fear the arbitrariness of death; and

1. Scholarly interpretations of the book of Job and God's answer often reveal a deep-seated, modern anxiety about the denial of God-created reality. There is no consensus on the interpretation of the divine speeches and some scholars feel that finding the meaning of the book in the divine speeches is 'risky' (Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, p. 197).

is portrayed in the context of war, where death is particularly arbitrary (similar to the insights surrounding Anat). The horse relies on its natural strength and power (39.19-25); it too trusts in the natural dynamics of life. There is a big difference between natural control that is built into the structure of creation and the kind of manipulating control advocated by deuteronomic theology. Chapters 38–39 portray the natural control of life that humans cannot manipulate and, most often, do not trust.

The Behemoth and Arbitrariness (40.15-24)

In the second discourse an alternative way of life to that of striving for excessive control is portrayed through the examples of the Behemoth[1] and the Leviathan. Scholarly concern has focused on whether these two animals are natural or symbolic, and, if natural, what kind of animals they are, since the text is ambiguous.[2] Clearly the animals function with intentional ambiguity as natural and symbolic animals simultaneously. As a wild animal, it is the Behemoth's way of life and the fact that the beast cannot be captured or controlled that should be observed; it is irrelevant what kind of animal it is. Symbolically there is, no doubt, a connection between the Behemoth and Canaanite and Sumero-Akkadian mythological bulls.[3] Bulls can represent the sexual power of fertility (control) and life as well as arbitrariness and death. As such the bull can symbolize Baal or even Elohim, in one strand of Israelite theology, suggesting an interfacing of control/life and arbitrariness/death. Or Baal can be a symbol of control/life that hunts and sometimes defeats and sometimes is incapacitated by a ferocious bovine beast, a symbol of arbitrariness/death—portraying an essential dynamic

1. The use of the plural form of *bᵉhēmâ* with third person masculine singular verbs yields the 'so-called intensive plural or plural of majesty' (see Ps. 8.8; 50.10; 73.22; Joel 1.20; 2.22; Hab. 2.16), which focuses attention on the special quality of this animal (M.H. Pope, *Job* [AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965], p. 268).

2. Perdue (*Wisdom in Revolt*), Pope (*Job*) and others consider it mythological, but most consider it natural and identify it as a hippopotamus. Keel (*Jahwes Entegegnung Hiob*, pp. 127-29) sees both Behemoth and Leviathan as mythological symbols of chaos.

3. Pointed out by Pope, *Job*, pp. 268-70.

interplay between control/life and arbitrariness/death. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh* the Bull of Heaven is a symbol of arbitrariness/death closely associated with Ishtar, the goddess of sexual love (control) and life. As an immature adolescent Gilgamesh tries heroically to eliminate arbitrariness/death by killing the Bull of Heaven. This temporary disruption in the natural dynamic of life causes Ishtar to mourn grievously; as he matures, Gilgamesh eventually discovers that his quest has been an illusion. Arbitrariness can be contended with—but never destroyed completely.

In Hebrew tradition the only other mention of the Behemoth is in 1 En. 60.7-9, where it is a beast of the wilderness and Leviathan is the beast of the sea. Both the sea and the wilderness symbolize chaos, arbitrariness and death. Hence, the audience of the book of Job may have initially assumed that the Behemoth is the antithesis of the all-controlling, conquering YHWH.[1] Yet instead of defeating arbitrariness, God uses it as the antithesis of excessive human control.

Like the Behemoth, the Leviathan functions with (intentional?) ambiguity as a natural and symbolic animal. As a natural animal, its power and defense against capture and control is more critical than the kind of 'real' animal represented. As a symbolic animal, Leviathan functions in the same way as the marine monster Lotan in Canaanite texts.[2] There Lotan is a symbol of the chaotic and random elements of the natural order, and the antithesis of the conquering elements represented by Baal. In those texts cosmological battles represent the creative, dynamic interaction between oppositional forces: Baal either temporarily conquers the arbitrary elements, or is temporarily

1. Perdue (*Wisdom in Revolt*, p. 221) and others feel that God praises his enemy, Behemoth, in this section before he does battle with him, as God will do in the Leviathan section. Perdue assumes that Job wants to sit on the throne of God, so God shows that Job will have to defeat God's enemies as God does in order to do so.

2. Pope (*Job*, pp. 276-78) has demonstrated the mythological character of Leviathan beyond question and has (with H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929]) pointed out the similarity between Tiamat and Leviathan.

subdued by them. Most importantly, arbitrariness is never completely eliminated.

Cosmological battles are also portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, specifically in deuteronomic theology. But now God contends with arbitrariness, also represented elsewhere by Leviathan, *yam, nahar, tannin,* or *rahab,* and definitively defeats it (for example, Isa. 27.1; 30.7; 51.9; Ps. 74.14; 89.10; Ezek. 32.2). God's victory is referred to by Job in 26.12-13, 'By his power he stilled Yam; by his understanding he struck down Rahab. By his wind the heavens were made beautiful; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent' (cf. 7.12). In deuteronomic theology arbitrariness is an enemy God destroys,[1] showing a lack of acceptance of the dynamic principles of life and an excessive need to install control.

In 40.15 God says, 'Pay attention (Heb. *hinnēh*) to the Behemoth which I have created as [I have created] you. He eats grass like a domesticated ox.' The rhetorical questioning of Job has stopped, and the interjection *hinnēh* directs him to pay attention and learn from this animal God is using to transform Job's thinking. There is similarity between humans and this beast: this wild animal has been created by God just as humans have;[2] all that applies to the beast also applies to Job. Although this wild beast lives in the wilderness without the excessive control of civilization and is subject to the arbitrariness of life, it survives on the same food as domesticated cattle who live within civilization. The beast has no need to strive for excessive control; it relies on the provisions of nature (a type of *natural*

1. Only in Ps. 104.25 is there acknowledgment of Leviathan without mention of a defeat in battle. In that text Leviathan is a creation of God that plays (*śḥq*) in the sea (a symbol of chaos and arbitrariness) as the wild animals play (*śḥq*) in the wilderness (see Job 40.20). However, some feel that this passage assumes that God has tamed Leviathan so he is now a pet that plays in the sea; see for example Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, p. 229.

2. In Gen. 2.19 both the animals and the *'adam* have been created from the *'adāmâ* and have unity as well as differentiation. See L. Bechtel, 'Rethinking the Interpretation of Genesis 2.4b–3.24', in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (The Feminist Companion to the Bible, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 77-117.

control) to protect and continue its life. Job is to learn from this symbol of the arbitrariness of life.

Then God states,

> Pay attention! His strength is in his loin muscles; his power is in the hardness (*bišʿrîrê*) of his belly (*biṭʿnô*); he makes hard (*ḥpṣ*) his tail like a cedar. The tendons of his thighs[1] are intertwined (*śrg*; vv. 16-17.

The loins are the seat of male sexual power (cf. Nah. 2.2; Prov. 31.17), and the hardness of his belly[2] is perhaps a metaphor for a male erection, like the reference to the hard or erect tail. The tendons of the beast's thighs may indicate his powerfully intertwined testicles. All of this connotes the natural sexual potential of the male to perpetuate life[3]—something bulls symbolize in some theologies. In group-oriented societies,[4] such as those found in the ancient Near East, sexual reproduction is highly valued as a form of natural control of death through renewal of life.[5] In light of Job's disease and the loss of his

1. In the Aramaic Targum the word is translated with *ʾešek*, 'testicle' in Lev. 21.20.

2. Most often the word *beṭen* (belly) is used of the swelling abdomen of a pregnant woman.

3. Pope, *Job*, pp. 271-72.

4. The classification of societies into the categories of group-orientation and individual-orientation, along with their characteristics, has been developed from the work of Mary Douglas (*Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* [New York: Pantheon, 1970]) and general sociological and anthropological studies of a variety of cultures.

When a society is group-oriented, most people derive their identity externally from the strongly bonded group to which they belong. This orientation influences all aspects of their thinking and lives. Group-orientation is not just simply belonging to a group, but the allegiance, responsibility and obligation of the individual to the group. It is this sense of loyalty and obligation that forms an important part of the bonding that holds the group together. What is generally misunderstood about group-oriented societies is the fact that people function as individuals, but they are encouraged to reach their full potential for the benefit of the group, rather than for the benefit of the individual. Ego needs are filled, but within the context of the needs of the group. Since identity stems from the group, the welfare of the group is considered identical to the welfare of the individual.

5. For a group-oriented society salvation from the finality of death

children, continued life is a concern. God is pointing out that sexual power is a natural provision, a natural control, that Job possesses. At this point the beast is suggestive of the images of bulls representing the sexual power of fertility (control) and life.

In addition, God indicates that the beast's 'bones are tubes of bronze and his limbs are bars of iron' (v. 18). He possesses the natural versions of civilization's bronze and iron, elements that people in civilization think they must create in order to survive. Earlier in 6.13, Job laments that he does not have 'flesh of bronze'; so now God reassures Job—since he was created just like this mighty beast.

The God declares that the beast 'is the superior (*rē'šît*) way of El,[1] so his maker brings near his sword'[2] (v. 19). This verse is difficult. The text's audience may assume at this point that the mention of the word suggests YHWH's cosmological battle with

comes from the biological continuation of life through children from one generation to another. This guarantees the continued existence of the household and the society as a whole. The individual and his or her identity continues as long as the household and the society continue.

Since salvation from death comes from the biological continuation of life through children, sexuality and fertility are vital and highly valued. Sexual intercourse is not considered inherently sinful, but is perceived in terms of salvation though perpetuation of the family group.

In contrast, in individual-oriented societies, because there is little or no bonding and obligation between individuals and because identity stems primarily from within the self, independent individuals have a heightened sense of isolation, decay and death. The physical state of the isolated individual leads only to death and nothingness. So the physical is devalued, along with activities that perpetuate the physical such as fertility and sexuality. The individual now acquires salvation from death through the continued life of the spiritual self in a spiritual world. Then, salvation is linked to the quality of the person's spiritual and ethical life.

1. The phrase 'the *derek* of El' is used in Prov. 8.33 to specify the 'fundamental principles' with which God created the world (cf. 2 *En.* 60.7-9; 2 *Bar.* 24.4; 4 *Ezra* 6.49-52). Perdue (*Wisdom in Revolt*, pp. 222-23) suggests that this high status gives the beast royal status so that he rules over the animal kingdom and all yield to his sovereignty. Only the creator dares to do battle with him.

2. Contrast this protecting sword to the judging and vengeful sword of God in Deut. 32.41 or Job's image in 19.29.

the Behemoth. The rest of the passage, however, does not support that theme; and the reference to the 'superior way of El' does not support this assumption. Instead, this wilderness animal that relies on natural sustenance, power and control, represents a superior way of life—that of trusting the natural control and arbitrariness of creation, trusting the way of El. When this reliance is present his Maker protects him, as indicated by God's (symbolic) sword. The contrast between God's sword in deuteronomic theology, where it punishes evildoers (Deut. 32.41; Judg. 70.20; Job 19.29; Ps. 17.13; Isa. 27.1; 34.5-6; Jer. 12.12), and God's protecting sword here, should be observed. With the natural provisions and protection of God, the beast has no need for excessive control. And Job is just like this animal.

God continues by pointing out that,

> The dry wood (*bûl*) of the mountains sustains him; all the wild animals of the field play/celebrate (*śḥq*) there. He lies down under the lotus bushes, in a covert of reeds and in marshes. The lotus bushes provide him shade, the willows of the brook surround him. If the river is turbulent, he is not anxious. He trusts even though the Jordan rushes against his mouth (vv. 20-23).

Most commentators have difficulty with the idea of 'dry wood' (*bûl*). It has been suggested that the word be altered: the most common emendation is to *yᵉbûl*, 'produce'. But a change is not necessary. For dry wood to sustain a living being contradicts human expectations. What humans consider life-threatening or incapable of sustaining life is what actually provides sustenance for this animal. This reversal of human expectations is exactly God's point; God is trying to broaden and transform Job's thinking. This place that humans consider incapable of sustaining life actually sustains and protects the animals; it is where they 'play', where they 'celebrate' the dynamics of life. And the wilderness also provides the beast with water, which is life-sustaining. But, when the water is turbulent, it can be life-threatening to those who stand in its midst. When the water is rushing against the beast's nose and mouth, his life is clearly threatened, yet he is not anxious. In the midst of this interfacing of oppositional forces, the beast trusts in the life-sustaining

potential of God's creation. This picture of the Behemoth living in the wilderness and trusting the principles of God's creation stands in contrast to the potential of excessive control that can characterize civilization.

Finally God asks, 'By his eyes who[1] can capture (*lqḥ*) him, with barbs who can pierce his nose?' (v. 24). This verse is difficult: capturing an animal 'by its eyes' does not make sense. Some commentators have suggested that the animal may have been captured by being stared at; or by injuring, blinding, or plastering his eyes with clay. Regardless of how the capture is accomplished, the issue is: can humans domesticate this beast and change its way of life? The answer is no. The arbitrariness of life cannot be domesticated (brought into civilization) and controlled by human beings.

The Leviathan and Arbitrariness (40.25-32 Heb.; 41.4-26 Heb.)

The Leviathan most strongly represents the arbitrary elements in the structure of creation; yet the main element in 40.25-32 is a piling-up of metaphors, showing that the Leviathan cannot be captured and subdued by Job or, by implication, humanity:

> Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down its tongue with a cord? Can you put a rope in its nose or pierce its jaw with a hook? Will it make numerous supplications to you? Will it speak soft words to you? Will it make a covenant with you to be taken as your servant forever? (vv. 25-28).

The 'supplications', 'soft words' and 'covenant' are the sort uttered and agreed upon by a vassal before the suzerain.[2] The implication is that human beings are not a controlling suzerain capturing and subduing arbitrariness as their vassal. In addition, arbitrariness cannot be played with (Heb. *śḥq*; cf. v. 29,

1. Because the first half of this verse is short, scholars such as C. Westermann (*The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981], p. 119) and Pope (*Job*, pp. 282-83), have suggested augmenting with *mî* (who), which I have followed.

2. Pope, *Job*, p. 279; cf. G.E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: The Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

traded (v. 30) or harpooned (v. 31). 'Lay hands on it; think of the battle. You won't try that again!' (v. 32).

The next section (41.1-3) is very difficult.[1] The assumption has been that the text has suffered sabotage[2] or textual corruption.[3] Nevertheless, if the text is translated as it stands as addressed to Job directly, not to the Leviathan within an address to Job, then the difficulty vanishes. The clue to this orientation toward Job is the interjection *hēn*, 'pay attention'—similar to *hinnēh*, 'pay attention', which begins the Behemoth section (vv. 15 and 16). Verse 41.2b confirms that this passage is about Job since it is Job, not Leviathan, who has presented himself before and is confronting God. It is Job's theology that is being discussed, not Leviathan's.

> Pay attention (*hēn*), his expectation is false (*kzb*, in the *niphal* formation). Moreover, by[4] his vision (*mar'āw*) he is overwhelmed.[5] So it is not cruel that one awakens him (*'wr* III). But he who presents himself (*yṣb*, in the *hithpael*) before me,[6] he who confronts me (*qdm* in the *hiphil*), I will make whole/reconciled (*šlm*, in the *piel*), under the whole of heaven, him to me[7] (41.1-3 Heb.).

Deuteronomic theology provides Job with his expectations and vision of life and God.[8] Having just shown that arbitrariness

1. See *Job*, p. 281; Dhorme, *Commentary*.
2. Pope, *Job*, p. 281.
3. See S.R. Driver and G.B. Gray (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921], II, pp. 335-37) for the difficulties and the emendations proposed. For example, B. Duhm (*Das Buch Hiob* [Freiburg: Herder, 1897]) places these verses at the end of the Behemoth section, assuming that they relate to the beast and not to Leviathan.
4. Assuming the section speaks of Leviathan, scholars are distressed by the vocalizing of the *'l* as a preposition, *'el*, and have emended it to *'el*, 'god' and *'elim*, 'gods' (despite the singular verb). Addressed to or about Job, the text can be read as the Masoretes have pointed it.
5. The MT has an interrogative, which I (and others) am omitting for clarity.
6. Some manuscripts read here *l'pānāw*, 'before him'.
7. Scholars have found the phrase *lî hû'*, literally 'to me he', problematic; and have emended it to *mî*, 'who'.
8. Visions of the night harkens back to 33.14-15, where Elihu states,

cannot be conquered or subdued, God states that Job's theology of control is false and that this false theology overwhelms Job, causing him pain and suffering when he encounters the randomness of life. Awakening Job from his false vision is not cruel—in fact, it is precisely what God is trying to do. Those who confront and struggle with God will be reconciled to God's creation and the reality of God's functioning. Therein, they will be made whole by a valid theology, rather than an illusion.

Then God returns to Leviathan in 41.4-26. Again God lays out the power and defense that arbitrariness (Leviathan) has: 'I will not be silent about his limbs or about the matter of his strength or the appearance of his proportions'. This is a creature that God has made, and God is proud of its power, proud of this element in the structure of creation.[1] In contrast to the previous section (40.25-32) this part is not addressed specifically to Job, but framed more generally:

> Who can penetrate the face of his [the Leviathan's] outer garment, pierce his double coat of mail? Who can open the doors of his face, encircled with terrifying teeth? His back[2] is rows of shields, tightly shut up as with a seal. Each sticks to the other so that no air intervenes. Each is welded to the other, they clasp and cannot be separated (41.5-9).

No one can defeat arbitrariness—and that must include God.[3] God created arbitrariness as an essential aspect of creation, not

'God speaks in one way and in two, though people do not perceive it. In a dream of the night, when deep sleep falls on mortals, while they slumber on their beds.'

1. Note that in the *Gilgamesh Epic* the goddess Ishtar mourns the defeat of the Bull of Heaven—the divine world does not want arbitrariness/chaos defeated. In contrast, some modern Bible scholars have suggested that the powers of chaos are mighty and fierce and must be confronted, limited and defeated by God, but not eliminated (for example Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, p. 226).

2. I am reading *gēwô*, 'back', with the LXX and Vulgate, instead of the MT *ga'ᵃwâ*, 'pride'.

3. Some scholars feel that the Leviathan section (as well as the Behemoth one) points to the Divine Warrior's ability to repel in battle the threats of chaos against the divine rule, so that divine sovereignty can be reasserted. Metaphors of combat dominate. See Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, p. 202.

as something to defeat and destroy. Arbitrariness simply cannot be eliminated or restrained; it is essential to 'creativity'.

> The sword attacking him does not avail, nor does the spear, dart or javelin. He regards iron as straw and bronze as rotten wood. No arrow makes him flee, slingstones turn to chaff on him. Clubs he counts as splinters, he laughs at the rattle of javelins... On the dust/earth there is no equal; he is one created without fear. He overlooks everything that is lofty; he is king over all the sons of pride (vv. 18-21, 25-26).

Ultimately, the interaction between control and arbitrariness takes predominance over the human need to overcome arbitrariness with unlimited control. Let us mention in passing that this is particularly true of the upper class and powerful kings, the dominant levels of society (the 'sons of pride').

God's answer begins by presenting one polarity of the dynamic of life, the natural control element of creation which humanity cannot master. Then God presents the other polarity of the dynamic of life, the arbitrary element of creation which humanity cannot eliminate or subdue. By implication, human attempts to eliminate randomness by striving for unlimited control amount to apostasy.[1] Deuteronomic theology, despite its insights, has a false foundation.

Job's Response (42.1-6)

How does Job respond to his face-to-face encounter with God? The language of Job's response is once more ambiguous, subject to multiple interpretations. On the surface Job appears to change, but there are subtle indications that suggest that the transformation may not be as thorough as it might appear. A tranformation is seldom quick or easy to achieve.

Job begins his response by saying, 'I know that you can do all things and that no purpose (*mᵉzimmâ*) of yours can be thwarted'

1. Robertson ('The Book of Job', pp. 446-69) and Williams ('"You Have Not Spoken Truth of Me"', pp. 231-55) suggest that God's answer reveals God as a capricious, chaotic and even jealous tyrant who abuses power, so Job's renunciation is proper. This is the most blatant rejection of the dynamic, deeming it capricious, chaotic and tyrannical without acknowledgment of the oppositional qualities.

(42.2). Is Job realizing that no essential principle of God, such as arbitrariness, can be thwarted by the human need for control? Or is Job again using deuteronomic language, like that of Eliphaz in 5.8-16 or Elihu in 37.23?

Then Job repeats God's initial question and responds to it,

> 'Who is this that obscures [my] design (*ʿēṣâ*) without knowledge?' Surely, I spoke of what I did not know, things too extraordinary (*niplâʾôt*) for me to understand... I had heard of you by hearsay, but now my own eyes have seen you. Therefore, I retract (*mʾs*)[1] and repent (*nḥm*) in dust and ashes (*ʿal ʿāpār wāʾēper*; 42.3, 5-6; cf. 38.2).

God's initial question had suggested that Job's deuteronomic theology had obscured his perception of God's principles. Now Job admits his ignorance. But is he also hinting that things are still beyond his comprehension (compare to Job in 9.10-13, Eliphaz in 5.9 and Elihu in 37.5, 14, 16)? Job concedes that his theology is hearsay knowledge, acquired from the human community, and that it does not reflect the reality of God. He appears to retract his theology and repent,[2] not of sin but of his misconception.[3] Then he repents in 'dust and ashes', using a

1. There is no object to the verb, so some scholars supply 'myself'. But as Pope (*Job*, pp. 289-90) has noted, the object need not be expressed when it is evident from the context (cf. 7.17). Actually, for Job to despise himself for his theology and to despise his theology are the same concept. Compare to H.H. Rowley, *Job* (London: Oliphants, 1976), p. 266.

2. His repentance is generally interpreted as regret for his attack on God's justice, so it is an affirmation of divine sovereignty (cf. Crook, *The Cruel God*, p. 156; Fohrer, *Hiob*, pp. 532-34; Kubina, *Hiob*, p. 152; G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972], pp. 221-26). Perdue (*Wisdom in Revolt* p. 237) posits that Job rejects his 'angry indictments that destabilize the order of creation and providence of God'. Others suggest that he does not really repent at all because God is an imposter God who abuses divine power (see Curtis, 'On Job's Response to Yahweh', pp. 495-511; Robertson, 'The Book of Job', pp. 46-49; Williams, '"You Have Not Spoken Truth of Me"', pp. 231-55).

3. It is interesting to note that the first step (questioning, thinking critically and confronting) is taken by Job, to which God responds. Compare to the views of Crook (*The Cruel God*, pp. 153-56); Dhorme (*Commentary*, pp. 645-46); Preuss ('Jahwes Antwort an Hiob', pp. 338-43); H.H. Rowley (*Job* [London: Nelson, 1970], pp. 325-36); S. Terrien ('The Jahve Speeches and Job's Response', *RevExp* 68 [1971], pp. 497-509; 'The

conventional deuteronomic method of demonstrating repentance. Job cannot let go of his tradition. Are these ambiguities in his response a way of demonstrating humanity's continual regression into a need for excessive control?

The Epilogue (42.7-17)

At this point the story returns to the orderly prose narration of the prologue and to the deuteronomic theology world of the prologue, which carries on as if Job's struggle has not occurred. Job's friends persist in clinging rigidly to their deuteronomic theology and are condemned. So, to prevent God from doing something foolish (*n^{e}bālâ*) like punishing them for their false theology, the friends are told to take seven rams and seven bulls and offer sacrifice for themselves (42.7-9). Of course, the audience has already seen that Job's pious sacrificing on behalf of his children has protected them from nothing (1.5).

Then the audience is told that Job's fortune (*š^{e}bût*)[1] returns twofold. The use of the word *š^{e}bût* is ironic. In deuteronomic theology *š^{e}bût* is most often associated with the reward that God bestows after the punishment of exile (cf. Deut. 30.3; Jer. 32.44; 33.7, 26; Zeph. 3.20). Yet the audience knows that Job was not being punished by God. And once his 'fortune' returns,

> all his brothers, sisters, and former acquaintances call on him and... console (*nwd*) and comfort (*nḥm*) him for all the misfortune Adonay has inflicted on him. And each person gives him one qesita and one gold ring (v. 11; cf. 2.11).[2]

Book of Job', in G.A. Butterick (ed.), *The Interpreter's Bible* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955], III, pp. 1183-84) that God is the Lord of History and that false questioning is rejected. The proper response is confession of sin and praise.

1. Reading the note, *š^{e}bût/it*.

2. Verses 2.11 in the Prologue and 42.11 in the Epilogue frame the story and form an inclusio. In 2.11, 'When the three friends of Job heard of all the misfortune that had come on him, they came... to console (*nwd*) him and comfort him (*nḥm*)'. In 42.11, 'His brothers and his sisters and his former friends [three groups] came to him... and they consoled (*nwd*) him and comforted him (*nḥm*) for all the misfortune that YHWH had brought on him'.

Job's upper-class deuteronomic friends and family, who have abandoned and shamed him while they think that he is being punished with 'misfortune' (19.13-19), now come to honor him and increase his wealth. What a bizarre world this is! Job's wealth seems to generate more from the structure of human society than from reward from God, because after the visits of Job's friends he possesses fourteen thousand male sheep, six thousand female camels, one thousand male oxen, and one thousand female asses (42.12; cf. 1.3). Is the exaggeration and absurdity of the epilogue again a subtle rejection of the deuteronomic vision of reality?

Has the satan won the argument? He was correct in questioning the theology behind Job's pious behavior: from a deuteronomic perspective Job did 'curse' God by questioning divine justice. Now we too return to our patriarchal, deuteronomic theology world, which carries on as if our struggle with the book of Job has not occurred. Have we been changed by our encounter with the book and its 'feminist theology'? Or do we find ourselves continually regressing into a need for excessive control? The book's theology of divine randomness ultimately conforms, to a large extent, with extant strands of ancient goddess theology. The unity of oppositions, and lack of aspiration for exclusive control, are hallmarks of contemporary feminist theology too. Reading Job thus, its message might become more palatable.

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